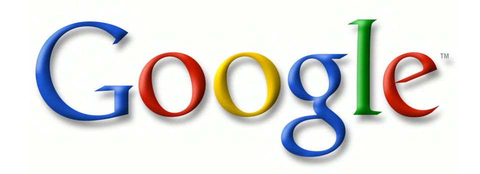


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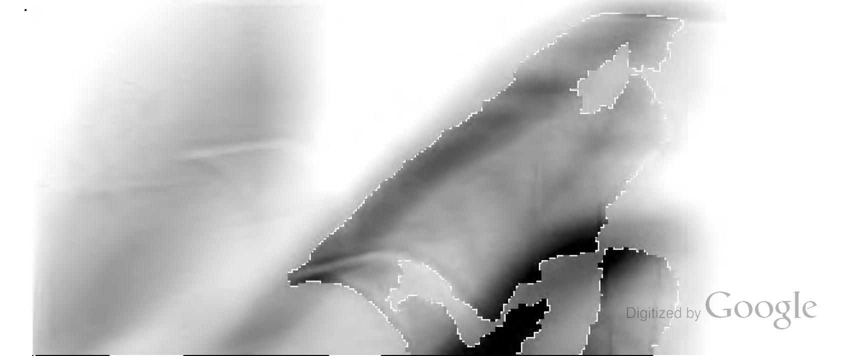
BY THE SAME AUTHOR—

AN EPIC OF WOMEN, AND OTHER POEMS.

Second Edition, 1871.

LAYS OF FRANCE.

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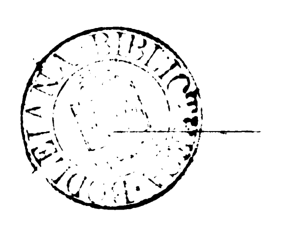


.AYS OF FRANCE.

(FOUNDED ON THE LAYS OF MARIE.)

BY

RTHUR W. E. O'SHAUGHNESSY.



LONDON:
ELLIS AND GREEN,
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LAUSTIC;

OR, THE

LAY OF THE NIGHTINGALE.

'This olde gentil Bretons in here daies
Of divers aventures maden laies,
Rimyden in her firste Breton tonge,
Whiche laies with here instrumentes thei songe,
Other elles redden hem for her plesance,
And one of hem have I in remembrance
Which I shall seie with goode wil as I can.'

CHAUCER : *Prologe* to the *Frankeleyne's Tale.*

'Une aventure vus dirai
Dunt li Bretun firent un Lai;
Laustic ad nun ceo m'est avis,
Si l'apelent en lur païs :
Céo est reisun en Franceis,
E Nihtegale en dreit Engleis.'

MARIE : LAIS. *MS. Bibl. Harl.* No. 978.

LAUSTIC;

OR, THE

LAY OF THE NIGHTINGALE.

Fair ladies, give me leave to sing:
  God will I may die serving you
And finding ever some sweet thing
  To praise your beauty and renew
  The soft enchantment of your love:
Now let my singing please your ears,
  Or gentle pity in you move,
Bringing your eyes the grace of tears,
  Yet never grieving you too sore
With any lay of mine or tale;
  Yea so: for I shall say no more
Singing a fair thing, ere I fail,
Of lovers and a nightingale.

In Brittany a goodly town
  Is Bon, and there indeed befell
What I shall show, and had renown.
  Two knights who loved each other well
  Through many a year were come to dwell
In that fair town at length; good fame
  In all France very wide and far
  They twain had earned for deeds of war;
And their whole living had no blame
  Of any, but before and then
  Right noble seemed they to all men.

Now this befell, and was the fate:
  One of those knights wed with his hand
A lady, who was fair and great—
  Yea, rather, throughout all that land
Fairest and greatest in good sooth:
In all the riches of sweet youth
  She was quite perfectly arrayed,
With every grace that flowers have
  Of spring, or beauty that a maid

May have or that a man may crave
To look on for his love. Great pride
  It was to woo and win that dame;
Yea, so to take her for man's bride
  It was a thing for which knights came
Full many and from far and wide
  In France; but soon they all had shame
Because of this one of renown
Who came and took her for his own.

How shall I say she was so fair?
  But truly God did her compose
  Of the same colours as the rose,
Which of all flowers he does declare
The fairest: this way she was fair:
  First pale she was, all delicate—
  Like the first sweetest leaf that shows
Frail texture, and lets penetrate
  Through its pure secret, to the flows
Of inner feelings intricate
  That change and glow,—so was she, too,
Pale and most tender; you might trace
  The heart and all its yearnings through

Her virgin colour: as she grew,
The perfect inner soul began
To rise to many a purple place
Of blushes on her changing face,
Or on her neck that shamed a swan
Or snow for white: at length her skin
Was all fair fading, all fine hue;
And her eyes held the fairest blue
That is not in God's heaven above.
She was a goodly bride to win!

She wedded ere she knew what love
Can and doth do; what right he hath
To rule in all; to change and move
All things that are; to make a path
For all hearts whither they shall go:
She wedded ere she well could know.

And, alas! for it did befall
Of sad fate to that gentle dame,
She could not love with love at all
The husband to whose hand she came;
But love the rather did intend

A thing most crooked ; day by day
See knew not of his subtle way,
Thought truth and cared not to defend
Her heart with any sort of arm ;
So day by day grew up the harm.
That other knight, her husband's friend
Seemed fair unto her eyes ; and fain
Her heart grew of his sight, till pain
And tears it was to miss his smile
That seemed such healing ; for no fear
Bade her withhold when he was near
Her heart ; but sweetest was the while
He, sitting nigh, touched her almost,
Or gold edge of his garment crost
Her own robe ; no doubt did defile
Her thought, to think that there was sin,
Or that in such way could begin
Love's ill ; but precious seemed the eve,
When so they sat, and he was singing
Some song to bid her bide the night
In peace ; the music, too, would leave
Soft sighing echoes, 'mid the clinging
Of many a balm of rich delight,

Stored in the soul through that fair hour
—The purples of some closing flower,
Thin distant scents of thyme or musk
Faded or finished far away
'Mid the dim blightings of the dusk.
And so, in many a subtle way,
Her heart was wholly leaguered round
And poisoned with a sweet love-wound;
And so she learned love day by day.
Alas for her again! She loved
Deep in her heart, before she knew
Aught of the ill that love should do
To her own heart and him she loved.

But in good time this thought did grieve
—All for the ancient love that had
Those knights—in secret communing
Her lover: yea, it made him mad
To think that he should e'en deceive
That friend of his in such a thing.
So for his honour he was moved
To have good care; and, sorely rueing,
With many a penance he reproved

His heart, and sought some straight undoing
  Of all this toil love's craft had made;
Who held both of them in his hand;
  Whose fingers were like fetters laid
About their hearts. And to withstand
Truly in this design, he plann'd
  That he would seek no more her face
To see, nor covet to draw near
  For sake of her in any place:
And this he vowed, with many a tear,
To do in all faith for a year.

Fair ladies, think not any shame;
  For love ye know hath longing feet,
Yea, it hath ever been the fame—
  To walk in strange paths of deceit;
I pray you, therefore, think no shame;
For surely it must be the same
  As long as love: so be content;
And I shall set me to repeat
  The whole thing for your ravishment,
And truly, for the tale is sweet.

The houses were together quite;
  The roofs and all the window places
Drew nigh with yearning to unite;
  They were quite like two lovers' faces,
Leaving just space enough for sighs
  And fair love looks and soft replies;
You could just see the blue above,
  You were just far enough for breath
  Indeed, or near enough for love;
  There lay a little turf beneath
Where a few sickly flowers grew,
  Chilled by the shadows of the eaves,
Warmed by the light that trembled through;
  A rose all white and with no leaves,
  Slender and like a maid that grieves,
And other flowers one or two.

But round about and from the sides,
  At every moment you could hear
A pleasant noise of wind that glides
  Among thick boughs; for very near
There was a garden, and a wood

Full of sweet-scented trees that stood
  Shivering for pleasure in the sun,
Whose shadows rustled on the wall;
  There through the day, one after one
The sweet birds sang till even-fall;
  And then they ceased, and the night long,
Sang that one sweetest of them all—
  The nightingale, O many a song,
Or all one song that could not pall
  Of love luxurious and long.

And heavy hazel boughs shut in
  The souls and scents of all the flowers,
  The noon, the night and the fair hours;
And kept the place all dim within,
A pleasant place for love's sweet sin.
  The noon fell almost to twilight
Under the heavy hazel boughs;
And the great shadow of each house
  Growing made dark the other quite;
There the dim time was very sweet;
  And hours between the noon and night
Were slow to pass, with lagging feet

And wings full-loaded; tarried late,
  Till long fair fingers from the deep
Dark wood came forth to separate
  Leaves, lights from shades and love from sleep,
And the moon, like a dreamed-of face
  Seen gradually in the dark,
Grew up and filled the silent place
  Between those houses wan and stark.

After a year that she was wed
  And had well striven with this love,
Thought shame of it. well purposèd
  To slay it, yet, for all she strove,
Loved with a love she could not quell;
After a year, that lady fell
  Quite weak in heart because of it;
She was like one on whom some spell
  Ill and mysterious hath lit
To work great harm; she could not tell
  Her beads at night the holy way
Her wont, nor any more compel
  Her pining feeble heart to pray;
  But silently she used the day,

Mourning within, and weeping kept
The night, and scarcely now she slept.

One night in the full summer's tide,
  —Throughout the house no sort of stir,
—For sleep lay heavily on all
  Though love most heavily on her,
She left her lord's bed; from his side
Rose softly, with no thought to fall
  Indeed to any sin; but all
To quench and quell the heat she had,
The heat within that made her mad.

She threw the casement open quite,
  And let the summer air come in:
Have you not stood, the summer night
At windows; felt with soft delight
  The air come from the balmy land
Play in your bosom with no sin,
  Play in your bosom like a hand?
She stood and felt it on her brow,
  Like a kiss straying here and there,
  Like light lips playing in the hair;

She felt it on her neck, and now
  Creeping through every loosened fold
Of the night garment, more and more
  To slake her body with some cold
Sweet touch of dews it thirsted for.
The night so softly treated her,
  And, fair and fond, the moon so sought
To lure with smiling; every stir,
  Or breath, or sound, or silence, taught
So pure a peace, they cheated her
  Almost of bitterness and thought;
They strove to heal the heaviness
And that most secret sore distress
  Of her long ailment for love's sake;
  And all the night-sounds could not make
Her fear for all the loneliness;
Nay, for hard by her in the glade
  Of hazels was the nightingale;
  And his known singing did not fail,
Like a fount babbling in the shade,
  Or music of familiar tale.
All the sweet day things were in sight;
  And, with the wandering of her gaze,

She sought them now in the changed light,
  Knew them in each inconstant phase,
  Found them in each familiar place;
She counted all the flowers plain
  Under the house;—she could see quite
The frail rose-petals with the stain
Of their scarce love-tint in each vein,
  Tender and shrinking, almost white:
There had she looked on them for hours;
  It was like dreaming the most sweet;
A flower she was among those flowers,
And soft light touchings of the air
  For lips of love seemed with full greet
Kissing around her, faint and fair,
Over her bosom and her hair.

But it befell that she was stirred
  Out of the stillness of her dreaming;
  A sudden shadow crost the streaming
Moonlight: some faint sound was heard;
  Sure one with step or touch did scare
  The deep night musings. She aware,
With sweet forebodings that went through

Her secret soul, scarce her eyes moved
For dread, until she saw and knew
The face of him who was so loved.
He was before her in full light;
And the great steady moonbeams made
The narrow window-ledges bright
About him; but a thickened shade
Hid all the chamber; he was leant
Such way against the inner wall
Deep in the dark, that scarce at all
She saw the uncertain lineament
Of a dim drapery that let fall
About him many a changeful fold;
Maybe sometime his heart was told
That she had felt his look on her;
He was as one that could not stir;
Their eyes met: then they seemed to touch
At length with eyes and lips and face;
For soul yearned forth to soul with such
A might of yearning, all the space
Seemed to yield fast between them, yea
Grew rather to a perfect way.

O 'twas a feast in every feeling
  So long a-hungered; sudden balm,
All a long fever slowly healing
  And reaching quickly with its calm
Each inmost lurking place of pain,
That knew those lovers, seeing plain
  Each other after so long loss;
Eye sated eye, face answered face;
And so their looks did interlace
  They made a shining path across
The moonlight in that silent place:
For heaped-up floods of long desire
  Were loosened, and there was no power
  In all that tender midnight hour
To hold or stand against them,—nay,
But rather all things did conspire,
  Moonlight and nightingale and flower,
In a sweet aid to help that they
Should yet meet love, cheating the day
  And all their niggard fate's hard stress.
So the night found for them a breast
  Of dreams and dews, and safe indeed
  Under her hair's dark shining tress,

Full of sweet quietness and rest,
Where they might have their love and lead
Its luscious hour without molest.

They both were pale, and bore long trace
Of sorrow; each one read with fears,
Looking upon the other's face,
Great written histories of weeping,
Great woven tapestries of tears;
Saw the dim stains love cannot hide
Under each wan white eyelid keeping
Piteous record; found out beside
Full many a passage of plain teen,
And in a writing true and wet
Of what heart's pain and feeling's fret
Through the long desolateness had been;
For, lo! on either face was cast
Some shade of the long bitter past.

They lingered, learning all these tender
Secrets, and loved them as they learned;
So each to each, with sweet surrender
Of such sad lore as was hard earned

Through so much labour of long grieving,
Yielded at length past all deceiving
  The soul's bare surface; quite revealed
Its inward secret of remorse
And yearning, that had grown but worse
  Lying all fearfully concealed.
But soon their weak hearts did revive
With fertile bliss; and love did thrive
  A pure and spiritual flower
Fit to inhabit the soft soils
  And regions in that holy hour
Of midnight, fain indeed to live
  For subtle and mysterious joys;
A tender flower, whose sense recoils
  From coarser climes of the day's noise,
And sights and shreds of sunlight. Then,
  Their souls made compact to renew,
Apart and secret from all men,
  Love-interchangings long and true;
And love's own mystery was done,
That silent hour, a way that none
  But the nightingale and the moonlight knew.

Love lasted through the summer time;
  And had a language all its own,
Of separate sighs and wordless rhyme,
  Of communing looks and kisses thrown;
And had no need for lustier clime
  Than the unearthly midnight; grown
Estranged at length from all the things
  Whose life sleep steals, but nigh of kin
To the dim unviewed hoverings
  Of sweet things shadowy and thin
That traverse moonlight with pale wings
  Of amber, when on blinded eyes
  Of men some heavy dream-death lies.
—For, soon as, with all stealthy creep
  Of rays, the moon came forth again
To touch each hostile sight with sleep
  In aid of lovers, not in vain
Released, they two did haste to reap
  The great fresh harvest of each heart,
Grown up through lonely hours unculled:
  Their lives indeed day tore apart
  And left a-dying; but each night

Came just in saving time, annulled
  The hard day's spell and bade re-plight
  Love's broken bonds with new delight.
No moment longer could they sit
  With day-long agonies that strove
To bring on night desiring it,
Ere from those window-places, lit
  With smiling of the moon, they wove
Some mesh of intermingling looks
That felt and fastened to each place
  Of beauty, crept to and took hold
In all the shadowy nestling nooks
Dimmest where love could ever trace
  Love; and in measure manifold
They soon paid back all stolen peace;
  And with new presence soon consoled
All pining; till the whole disease
  Of sorrow, in each sundered breast
Begotten, was divinely cured
  With rapture of most new and blest
Communion. Such sweet time, assured
  Of all love's joy, they could consume
Serenely in a long-drawn leisure,

Fulfilled with many a tranquil bliss,
  Born as mere transitory bloom
Upon a branch, for the mere pleasure
  Of fragrance; many a tiny way,
Almost as pleasant as a kiss,
  They found for making a sweet play
Of love; they had continual treasure
  Heaped in their hearts; things fair to say
With looks or tokens; to relate
  All quaint sad reveries of the thought
In loneliness, and through what state
The time had brought them; what new task
  Or pastime loneliness had taught
Their fretting fingers; so to ask
And so to render little treats
  Of trusting. Often they had wrought,
Seeking such precious toil as cheats
Love-languishment, some fair device
  In work of tapestry most fine;
Or on a scroll dainty and nice
Set forth most delicate conceits,
  Written in many a pleasant line
Of sweet love-poesy: and ways

Full easy found they to exchange
  Their gifts and messages athwart
The white path of the thin moon-rays,—
  For love did strengthen every art,
And, with his charm, subtle and strange,
Prospered them, as he doth always,—
  Yea, so they learned a pleasant skill
To cast those things each unto each,
  And could e'en send them at their will:
And truly they failed not to reach
Fair interchange with wafted sign
  Of kissing, or prolonged embrace
Of looks; such way they could combine
That many a moment they half felt
  Touchings sweet; as of face on face,
When lips drain lips and eyelids melt
  And meeting tears make soft the place.

And, more and more, this thing became
  To them a custom, the most sweet
In all the heart; and so the dame
Beloved it, she forgot to chide
  Her heart for all this fond deceit;

Yea, she forgot or cast aside
  Such thought and that it was half sin.

No man can otherwise abide
  In life but love must enter in:
This thing—do what she would—God knew
  She could not help with all her care,
Nor change; for love will have his due;—
  And before God she was most fair,
And wise and good in all her way:
  Himself shall pardon and forbear
In all things, as His mercy may.

So when the night was, and her lord
  Lay in the bed beside her sleeping,
She made no stir nor uttered word,
But, while the nightingale was heard,
  And all the tender spells were keeping
Silence and safety, rose and went
  To greet that lover; and so stayed,
Nor thought that many an hour was spent,
  Ere she returned once more and laid
Her down beside her lord, with fear

He might have sought her and been wrath
Not finding her; yet, all so dear
And needful are the needs love hath,
That many a time she rose again
And left him; who, when he perceived
She was so oft away, was fain
To chide her somewhat; but believed
Her true, and that she had at most
Some fantasy of wayward mood,
To see, maybe, the trees dark-leaved
By the pale moonlight shadows crost,
Or sickness of some hidden brood
Of nameless longings unallayed,
Wherein he nothing might avail,
But whereunto some soothing made
The still night and the nightingale.

She was so fair indeed and good,
And to his word in all so meek,
In heart he could not, by the Rood,
Find chiding for her harsh to speak;
But he did pray her, for the fear
He had she might attain to ill

Through some chance spell of all the drear
  Strange magic of the night, to still
  Her sad unrest and wanton will;
Yea, that she should not, for that bird,
  Forsake her lord so and her sleep;
Whereto she promised with fair word;
  And yet from love she could not keep.

But, on one day, he came, withal,
  And did bespeak her otherwise—
Reproaching, and with wrath in all
  He said,—that he indeed was wise
Of her whole doing and deceit,
  And of that love she had so sought
To cover with all seeming meet;
  And for this wrong of will and thought
She did his life, he bade her take
  Fair shame; because himself was true
In all his way with her, nor brake
  His faith at all.—This he would do,
He said, because of his love's sake,—
He would still bear with her, and hide
  Her fault from men—yea, still renew

Some trust in her; no more to chide
  Or tell her of that thing again;
If she would truly do her part
  For right, and spare not toil or pain
In striving till she freed her heart
  From all this grievous bond and stain.

O when his voice that way she heard,
Alas, she could do nought but weep;
  For very shame of her deceit
She fell down in a sorrow deep;
Amid her tears she spake no word
  And looked no look that could but meet
With him her husband; yet she quite
  Desired to touch him and entreat
The most of pardon that he might
  For the great wrong of will and thought
  She e'en had done his life; yea, now
She purposed with herself to smite
  And slay this evil love had brought
  Into her heart; and, with a vow
To Mary without sin, she said
  She would make true her living now,

And of her love make recompense
To him her husband; so she prayed,
Through her whole grief and penitence,
God might forgive her that offence.

But lo, as the man went away,
He took into his heart that day
To do a hard thing; for he hailed
His servants all, yea, the whole band
Who served with willing heart and hand,
And briefly spake to them, nor failed
To tell them all there was a cause
Of sore displeasure and unrest
To her, whom each with service best
Of love and honour, holding dear
Did serve; wherefore, should each man pause
In his own labour and forbear
From doing other far or near,
Until he might bring death to pass
On such as wrought this ill. Alas,
For then he said the nightingale,
He was the doer of the thing;
For that no fowl at all he was,

But a magician who, for bale
And mischief on them all to bring,
Out of his witcheries did sing
So sweetly faining all the nights
That he could lure with his delights
Their mistress from her lord and sleep;
Yea, for the singing he did keep
All night was truly not of bird,
For sweetness new and magical
Such as no man had ever heard,
But an enchantment was it all.

And so, he said, was come to ail
The gentle lady whom all loved,
Yea, she was grown quite wan and pale;
All men had seen it as he told,
How she became as one sore moved
With witcheries; disease she had,
A kind that no man could unfold
With any leechcraft; fallen and sad
She was of face and faint of eye;
Her head like any rose's head
When it is even come to die;

Her hand too, like a dwindled leaf
In autumn time, quite thin and wan;
  You might see all the tender thread
  Of the veins through, it was so thin;—
And this came all of some mischief
And not her fault; for sure no man
  Stood there to give her word of sin.

He said too, he was full of fear
  And very heavy sorrowing,
To think some ill fate might be near
  Unto them all; but most to bring
  Great woe upon his house and shame,
Or losing of his wife so dear.
  But having heard, all in God's name
They joined them to him with a will;
  And did devote themselves to do
  The thing he said; yea, in God's name,
That no man should take rest until
  So fared he, that he brought or slew
Some certain way that bird of ill
  And all his magic overthrew.
Then took they many a kind of arm

That might such quest of theirs assure;
Nor spared they any sort of lure
Man makes, that he may take or harm
In any way of sport the free
Wild birds that are in field or tree:
And, lest some chance should be to save,
By all his swiftness or his craft,
That bird from death through snare or shaft
Wingèd of skill from bow,—they gave
A care made perfect through long toil
To make a lime most deadly sure,
Yea, so that never bird could foil
The death of it; for without cure
The touch and poison of it were,
And the clinging of it most sore:
And, truly, this was such a snare
As fowler never had before.

And he who moved them to this thing,
He led them; and, when all was made,
He tarried not their steps to bring
Into the garden and the glade
Where that sweet bird was wont to sing:

There soon, with voices harsh and rude,
  They startled all the tender shade,
  And broods of mysteries that lay
Of long time in that solitude,
  Woven among the leaves alway:
  For there he brought them on that day,
In a great troop and multitude,
  The nightingale to take or slay.

In truth they had small care or grace;
  They trode down all the tender flowers,
Of whose short sweetness was that place
  Made fit to serve the short sweet hours
  That pass and come no more in life;
They wrought a ruin in short space;
  And hasted in unseemly strife
With the fair boughs and branches all,
  And cast their leaves down on the ground,
  And wounded them with many a wound,
And many fair trees they made fall.
But very soon it did not fail,
  Before they had done half their care,
  And purpose, that they had in snare

That craftless bird the nightingale ;
Who was so free from stain of sin
That way they thought that he was in,
He fell to them quite unaware
It was his death they sought to win.
They took and brought him in their hands,
The life yet in him, to their lord ;
Who, when he had him, with fair word
Praised their good care of his commands ;
Then each man went forth to his lands.

But straight into the house came he,
That good knight, when the men were gone ;
Yea, he was even in a haste,
And sought his wife where she might be ;
For yet the thought of the wrong done
To him in time so little past
Lay surely bitter at his heart ;
So, when he found her there alone,
He spake her thus and without art :
See, wife, he said, here is that bird
—For well I trow that this is he—
Who strangely and so long hath stirred

Thy rest in nights past; yea, full sore,
With all his song and witchery,
Hath troubled all thy sleep and me;
But now I think he shall no more,
Nor may a song of his be heard,
For I have taken him in snare;
From him and evil everywhere
May we have peace for evermore.

So with that word, yea, as he spake,
He took him in his hands, and hard
He wrung him, so the neck he brake
And took the life away with ease;
And cast him to her afterward;
She could no way to save him make,
The bird fell dead upon her knees.

She was in middle of her grief;
Striving to take her leave of love,
And weeping all the while she strove;
But this new woe stole like a thief
Her heart, and the sad power to move
Her tears: first took she scarce belief

That it was truly and indeed
The singing nightingale she had;
Yea, no time had she seen him lead
Life in the body of a bird;
And for his song, holy and sad
And never with another heard,
Angel of God him might she call
Or something not to die at all.

She took him; in her hand she took
His body; and the life was scant
Within it, and his blown plumes shook
All in a palsy wofully;
In his breath too there was no pant,
And no stir at his heart nor look
Of pleasant living in his eye;
Surely his soul had broken plight
With sweet frail life and left to die
That relic. To such wretched sight
Her tears came quickly, and the thought
It almost was her love, so brought
Before her slain and faded quite
To wanness and sad autumn hue,

The death colour of leaves: she knew
Thereby, that, in her life, no more
Should be that summer colour of love
To purple it; and all the sore
Of thought within her filled with pain,
And grew such burden that she strove
If, with lips seeking, she might gain
—Yea, even out of that bird's bill,
A part of death. But, in the end,
She was turned to another will;
She thought it would be sweet to send
Unto her lover such last sign
Of sorrow, and that they must kill
Both of their hearts and unto deaths
Indeed quite equal them resign;
For that the harder part and fate
Of life prest with prevailing breaths
Bitter upon them, governed, gained,
And laid such snare for all that late
Their fairest, most indulged, their near
Real seeming dream, that now remained
For this no longer any state
Or place at all,—but love was clear

A thing unrealmed, a prey attained
By the hard fastening hounds of grief:
  So she would send that bird—their dear
Familiar—as a sign of brief
  Sad parting and of death all shared.

And now to do this she prepared,
And made soon, fair with many a lace,
  A little wallet tapestried
  Within of stuffs the richest dyed;
Full daintily she did enchase
  The outer part; and worked it all
  With broideries symbolical;
And, in the midst, she wrought a place
  For that slain bird; the body there
Lay fitly covered up and prest
Upon warm purples; in a nest
  It seemed, wings folded smooth and fair,
And the head sleeping on the breast.
A grievous gift was this indeed
For love to give.—But, with all speed,
  She did fulfil the thing and dare
  Its piteousness: it was conveyed

That trackless way which love had freed
  Across the unconfessing air.

  Then she said sorrow was all made,
To fill her life's long after-year
With the full burden she might bear
  Of loneliness and of regret,
  And sharp thoughts with an inward fret
Gnawing some remnant of a Past,
  Which should not give them ease while yet
At heart the very life might last.
She thought how wave of water feeds
  Upon some oasis of earth,
  Where hath been greenness and the birth
Of flowers;—how it takes the reeds
One after one, and with its lips
  Sucks in the lilies, makes sweet prey
Of all at leisure, and in sips
  Dissolves the whole of it away:
She deemed that it should be like this
  With those thoughts ever in her heart,
Feeding upon each separate bliss
  That once grew in the fragrant part

Of life called love: she would find store
  Of faded relic and perfume,
  To the most waste and meanest bloom
That love's great time for her once bore;
And sure the heart should be no more
  Ere such as this might all consume.

She thought, too, how that flower the Rose,
  —After that it hath filled all June
Full of its beauty, as man knows,—
How it doth e'en begin to lose
  Softly its colour; and then soon
To let the leaves and petals fall,
But with such falling gradual
  As you may count them one by one,
Yea, till it droppeth of them all:
And with her heart so it should be,
  Yea, with that flower of her heart;—
Full long should be the atrophy
  And falling of it part from part;
And, for it was in the true core
And richest soil of memory,
  Beauty of it should not depart,

Nor fragrance of it be quite o'er,
Till death's own snow for evermore
Were fairly laid on all the heart.

Ah, when the knight, her lover, found
And knew that last of gifts from her;
Such time now as he slow unwound
The broidered bindings one by one,
His heart within made many a stir
Trembling, many a time it swooned
With half foreboding what was done
To their hearts equal: soon he read,
And could not fail to understand
The tender silken hieroglyph;
And knew it written with her hand,
That both had better have been dead
Than to have loved so; and that life
Had used up sweet and had instead
No balm but death.—O then he sought
Indeed for death, that balm,—quite caught
And conquered of a great mad sorrow
That would no healing, while he thought
And knew that there should be no morrow

For him to look once on her face,
Or worship her in any place;
  That rather, with his heart's great sore
Of love, he should go far and near
  About the world for evermore,
And get no joy from year to year!

Ladies, when he had thought and wept
And gazed on that gift many a day,
  For it he found a casket bright
Of finest gold; therein he kept
That treasure, and with him alway:
  And then he went with many a knight
To save the tomb where Jesu slept:
In Palestine, so is the Lay,
  He fell and died in holy fight.

THE

LAY OF THE TWO LOVERS.

O Love, where is the bed we made
  In scented wood-ways for sweet sin?
The sun was with us and the shade;
    The warm blue covered us in:

All men their curse on us had laid—
  Finding had slain us both therein;
But, summer with us, not afraid
    Were we to love and sin.

O Love, the crushed place is quite fair;
Leaves have sprung back and flowers grown there;
  The blithe trees no long record bore;
  The flown bird knoweth no more;

The hard one never found our lair;—
We are not slain, love,—we are fair,
  And love, ay, as we loved before:
  —Let us go back once more!

THE

LAY OF THE TWO LOVERS.

LADY, is there indeed no place
  Beyond the world for thee and me?
Where we may love a little space,
  And joy as any flower or tree
That loves the sun; and half forget
  That life our enemy hath been,
And fate a bloodhound keenly set
  To hunt us on through waste and green
And night and day and year and year,
Lest we should hallow and make dear
  One spot of bitter earth with bliss?
Is there indeed, beyond the day,
  Beyond the eve, beyond the sun,
  No dreamed-of place where we shall kiss,

Ay, kiss and put all fear away,
  Death tarrying till our kiss is done?

Since I have loved thee, I have known
  Their hard irrevocable doom—
Ah, love,—mine henceforth and thine own—
  Whose lives are re-born in the womb
Of love: it seems all common food
  That erst might feed them shall no more
Bring to them any taste or good;
  But they shall go in hunger sore,
Seeking some manna that scarce falls
  On earth; and, surely, their lives long,
Full of sad secrets the world calls
  By names of shame, shall seem a wrong
To them and to the world. For, sure,
  Both I and thee, whom this fair bower
And frail night spells somewhile secure,
  Whom a thin heaven of scent and flower
Doth feebly part from outer deaths
  Awaiting sore and manifold
With stings of hate and long fierce breaths
  Of cursing,—small share do we hold

Of any meanest privilege
  To have and use our common lives
  With joy : but, rather, this love drives
Our doomed days cowering to some edge
  Of loveless strong humanity;
  And we are kin with some who lie
Slain shamefully on bitter grounds
  Where grew their furtive flower of sweet;
And some who, foiling the strong hounds
  Of tracking hate, have fled for meet
Safe cover where the trees held shade,
  Or grass and thornbush knew the feet
Of many a hunted thing afraid
  Of the sun's smile; who, through great plight
With death and very choice to die,
Have rapturously cared to buy
  One little year, one day, one night
Of their lives' confiscated own,
  Wherein to taste indeed of love
The great forbidden good unknown,—
  Yea, these may call us nought above
Brother or sister; and take hands
  Of us and lead us, as they shall,

Joined ever to their fameless bands
Who, of all ages and all lands,
Do bear one sad memorial
That here love hath no heaven at all.

My love, I have a lay well fit
For me to sing and thee to hear;
For they of whom I find it writ
Did long time, amid hope and fear,
Love secretly; having of fate
The seeming fair things and good state
Dull men are mocked with; but no place
Or liberty, by day or night,
To look upon that other face
Life had for them shedding strange light
Upon their inward thoughts. In fair
Green midst of mountain-lands they dwelt,
In Val de Pistre; for 'twas there
A certain king had sometime built
His castle. She, of whom I sing,
Was e'en the princess and his child,
Whom he would marry, coveting
To strengthen by harsh means or mild

His hated sway, to some hard lord
Of neighbouring hosts. But love had wrought
So fair a miracle and taught
Such strength to her, that no sharp sword
Might have compelled her to this thing.
And now a year was he besought
Of many, who, with pitying,
Beheld her beauty and the death
Love surely did intend to bring
Upon her, yea to the last breath,
That he would even let her wed
The fair youth, whose, alive or dead,
She could not fail to be. Alas,
He grew the harder, and took rage
Against them : so it came to pass
Their two lives, full of sad presage,
And faint with thoughts despairing fret,
Were leaguered round about with fear ;—
Yea, fear was as a demon set
About their steps both far and near
In every moment, in the dark
And in the day : the future year,
That once had glimmered from afar

E

With many a beacon-ray and spark,
  Like distant heavens of some star,
Was changed and faded now—yea, changed,
  As though with long dim ambushed gleams
Of deaths in shadowy phalanx ranged
  Against their coming days: their dreams
Were very heavy with the clank
  And echo the chained days still made
Around them; and oft-times they shrank
  From sleep, as though hard hands were laid
Upon the wide unguarded heart
To read each open thrill and start.

They had been happy, yea, in truth
A few sweet hours of precious youth,
  Ere the world found them. Once and more,
The rich effusion of some kiss
  Had warmed shy scents the roses bore,
Making the full heart of some noon
Their own most strangely, in a bliss
  No summer knew or felt before
They loved; and, once and more, the swoon
  Of eve had lengthened out some joy

Of theirs, delaying the hard chill
  And dim affright that would destroy
Too shortly such a day, until
  The blithe eternal nightingale
  Had seen and known, and did not fail
To sing that, though hard fate should kill
  The twain that midnight, they had taste
Of sweet, for one rich day of life.
Many a garden place was rife
  With tender record of fond waste
Of hours and broken words and sighs,
  In the long innocence when love
Kept fearful fetters on their eyes
  And lips and hearts, the more to prove
His strong life-filling flower, one day
  A bursting blossom not forborne.
But now the fair earth turned away
  Her summer from them: on no morn
Did shy beams, stealing from the sun,
  Bring early promise of joy born
To fill them till that day was done
  In some close paradise of bloom,
  Where love had made them a fair room

With unbetraying bird and tree
And sleek scared fawn.—O but to see
  The warm bright chambers under leaf
Sun-streaked and gilded morn and noon;
  The burrow under the arched sheaf
Whose crowned heads nodded to some tune
  Of wordless wavy motion, dim
And dense with harvest scent that drew
  The brown bee blundering o'er the rim
To drone about them the noon through!
O but to see, yea, once again,
  Though but to weep, the bed they left
Of prest and tumbled leaves with stain
  Of fair crushed flowers, the day he reft
The first long willing bliss from her,
And she felt safe to touch and stir
  The strange and gracious hair he had
That once so lured her, as a thing
Whereon love's blessing seemed to cling!—
  Ah, she had said, it would be sad
For her, then in the world, when time
  Were come that she could no more touch
His warm drooped head, nor draw the rhyme

Of soft words from his lips once more,
  Watching and loving overmuch
  Each passionate corner of his mouth:
And now 'twas almost come, that sore
  Too bitter time of her heart's drouth.

Their place was no more in the bloom;
All ruined was it; and their doom
  Was a thing sung of by the bird
That long had caught his rhapsody
  Straight out of their charmed thinking, heard
And felt like some strong melody
  The corn or trees made, wordless, wild,
Most wonderful: in the grey shade,
The searched and trampled solitude
  Still bore the curses that defiled
Its echoes; all the mournful glade
Had heard dread shouts and voices rude;
  Yea, the whole country no more had
One shelter of sweet green, one wood,
  One safe path bright for them, not one;
  But bitter seemed its smile, and sad
And like an alien land it grew,

That put scorn of them in its sun,
And death lurked in its shade they knew.

And now Death only let them draw
Each unto each, when most they drew
Nigh to himself: he only saw
Dread lonesome places where they came
In the dark, beautiful and white
Beyond their wont; oft-times blue flame
Quite clothed the marsh plants, and the night
Down there felt horror, seeing that one
So clasped and revelled on the slight
Soft splendours of a woman—death
Hard over him as a prey won—
Death stretching to him with armed hands
Nigh clutching at the throat where breath
Quivered so rapturously.

Ah, love,
There was no path to other lands,
Save only by the mountain steep
And desolate, that stood above
A mighty way and seemed to sleep
On through the year in storm or rain.

And yet, thou must be sure, so vain
  The fair world seemed, they oft would pray
Their tenderest fate might show them plain,
  Through some safe chasm, the merest way
To any desert of the earth,
Far from that country of their birth
  Where they were aliens. Many a hope
Had fallen from them.
                    Fearful seemed
  That mountain in the distance; slope
  On slope of green they counted high
Upon its side—down which there streamed
  Whole rivers fallen from the sky:
But, sometimes, they had even dreamed
  There was a way to heaven, past
The topmost crag and precipice;
  Often a golden cloud was cast
Across it bright, and like a piece
  Of purest heaven it floated there
  And faded not: but in the fair
Angelic moonlight quite a strange
  Most holy smile seemed resting wide
Upon its height, working some change

Of snowy mystery: one noontide
They saw high up there, nigh the sun,
Fair arched paths, gleaming every one
As though the winged angels trod
Them oft-time going up to God.

Then, for no better thing they yearned,—
Seeing the whole green world below,
Yea, and as far as they might go
Fleeing for ever, was all turned
Against their love,—than to be there,
Quite saved above the ken and reach
Of any man, where each to each
Might yield some latest hour more fair
Than all life past, and truly will
The utter breath to love, until
Some charmed sleep, wonderful and soft,
With deep strange soothings and long dreams
Of wings and golden miles of light,
Should take them; wherefrom, perhaps, oft
Awaking before death, warm gleams
Of the same sun would show them, bright,
The unchanged earth beneath them yet,

Their two selves, and the broad waste green,
Full of light singing wind and hum
  Ineffable, where to forget
All but one love they twain were come.

And now that love of theirs, I ween,
  Had even brought them, through fond sin,
  Past many a death that land decreed ;
And the king strove a while between
  A voice at heart that entered in
  Like a returning bird indeed
By disused unfamiliar ways,
With pleading overmuch of days
  When she, now scorned and half condemned,
  Seemed yet his child fair and unshamed,
A perfect promiser of joys ;—
  And the loud whisper of the land
And the unanswered urging voice
  Of many a counseller who planned
This way and that to save the law :
But day by day could only draw
  One thing the nearer to them—death.

Yea, as I singing of this lay,
—Knowing myself e'en such as they
Of whom I sing, one changed and filled
And lifted by a great pure love,
That is much stronger than aught willed
By me, and seemeth much above
This world,—as I do feel my heart
Rise many a time and glow and yearn
Like a thing doomed and set apart
For perfect sacrifice,—I say
As one who learneth and shall learn,
Those lovers and their love so fair
Had condemnation from the day
The bitter world began; both there,
And in all lands beneath the sun,
And here as there, and now as then,
Other than this had not been done
By the world unto them: for lo,
They be few women and few men,
—Of thousands here that come and go,
By life-long ways named virtue, shame
Sin, innocence, mightiness or fame,

Whither I know not,—few they be
That reach or touch, conceive or see,
Through all mock strivings, kisses, prayers
Cold passions, measured lusts of theirs,
This one love—led to every way;
Which whoso winneth, from that day
Hath heavens within him all unfurled
And clear sights of the other side
Of death. But half loves in the world,
And lusts, the dead roots that divide
From the spurned cast off flower, are great,
And many as mankind, crouch down
Timid and loathsome, without fate
Or hope or pang or passionate crown,
Dying among the deaths and days.
And these ignobly safe, being shorn
Of all the measureless curse or praise
Of love's unmeasured futures—born
Inevitably to the whole
True daring venture of the soul
Eternal through its chosen hell
Or chosen heaven,—these do possess

The altered earth, first peopled well
By love's first self; now to oppress
His straggling offspring, like some rare
And wingèd alien, having share
Of unknown being with the blue
And supernatural places fair.

—O Lady mine is this not true?
Were it not better I and you
Had found some straight way long ago
Up to the place we seem to know
With all our mingled being, hard by
In new parts of our destiny,
Or even dwelt in, as doth seem,
In parts so far they form a dream
Within and round us?—Mistress mine,
Since here the charmed space of a vine,
A few leaves shade, is all love's bower,
And all the time one reckless hour
Of treacherous night, wherein a cry
Too sharp amid our ecstasy
Must surely doom us; and since now,

Ay, more and more, we do avow
No wild wide earth were wide enough,
But the immenseness of our love
Must have its ending in some star,—
Were it not even better far
We had found freedom the first days,
And earned with our first kiss's breath
Some easy momentary death?

O to wake strangely in fair ways
Past every bar of death and birth,
Launched high above all law and hate
Or memory of the finished fate
Of sloughed pasts in a cast off earth,—
And bare and shameless through the whole
Eternal unreprovèd soul,
To lead on, formed into its form
And fated with its fate, this strong
Compelling passion, great and long,
And one in me and thee!—The storm
Of all the blind divine first things,
Whose vast eternal wills and wings
Bear them fulfilling, age on age,

The nameless elemental rage
  Of the same lusts, loves, hungers, thirsts,
That God who gave can ne'er assuage—
The storm of the great universe,
  With all its tidal throes and bursts
  Of passionate being and excess,
Should set us free of fate and curse
  And shame and tyranny and stress
  Of day and night—me to possess
  Thy soul and body for no less
Than thine and mine eternity,
And thee to give thyself to me
Through all thou art or hast to be.

I wonder, Love, in what sad way
  Of sudden bitter pang or shame,
  The world, that calleth by a name
Of sin this love of ours, shall slay,
Thinking to end us?—On that day,
  Shall we have dreamed of death at all?—
Shall we be sundered for the space
Of some blind fearful moment, face
  Unsoothed by face, so that we fall

Alone through the first dreary waste,
  Amazed with sickening doubt of death
  And love and fate?—Or shall the breath
Of our two beings, in their blithe haste
Escaping, meet, ere yet the taste
  Of holy agony hath ceased?

Ah, well could I desire that they—
  The twain whose one love was released
In Val de Pistre, years gone by,
Of whom I sing now—lest we try
  This perilled hour with too much bliss—
  Were e'en ourselves. Lady, one kiss,—
And I will finish now my lay.

Though men and women in their land
  Did wear the lure of softened looks,
And spake love-speeches, and laid hand
  In wedded hand, and read in books
Much gracious and real lore of love;—
  Yea, though they were right fair withal,
And bore rich outward shows enough
To cheat love's self with welcoming,—

Yet dwelt they, men and women all,
In hells of their own fashioning,
Where golden good of life was turned
To each foul contrary, and love
The true god, some rare day returned
In stainless perfect semblance bright,
Looked shamed and hideous in the light
Of long age-honoured lies, above
One heart's weak will to change or break.
Long years ago some fatal snake
Had crept among their hearts, and shed
The venom of false shames and dread
Between them all; and now the heart
Lied back unto the heart that lied;
And life lived false with life and died
Faining a faithless sanctity:
Yea, so that now, for each man's part
In life and good, God's changeless sun,
The green gay earth, the blithe blue sky
That spake unchanged of love did lie.

And, therefore, very few or none
Of all those men and women, framed,

As even they two and as we,
To know love and be known unshamed
Of love, had eyes at all to see
Or hearts to feel or voice to cry
That these were very far from sin
And had done nought that they should die
Like caitiffs : rather all could say
Some slight thing treasured up within,
Condemning them from some past day
When they but used the sun and bloom
And rapture of their frank fair world,
And knew not that its least perfume
And lightest joy were long become
Things chained and confiscate. Back-hurled
Upon their hearts in cruel hard
Accusing, knew they now e'en some
Of their own sweet words, whispered low
Where they were fit, for skies fair starred
And guileless birds and leaves to know
And take for music, not for ears
Of those who turn sweet words to spears
Against the heart from whence they flow.

And, truly, since the king had set
  His utter curse upon the twain,
And would not have the law be let
  From punishing, they had been slain
With common sinners the first day—
None finding in his heart a way
  To save them,—only for this thing,
  That she was daughter of the king
And might not fall beneath the hand
Of any subject in the land.
  So, many a hopeless day, meantime,
Was added to their numbered days.

  At last spake some one that their crime
Should be for God to take the right
  To punish or forgive, in ways
Of some ordeal in the sight
Of all. And being nigh the year's
  Great day of meeting and of sports,
  When trials many and of sorts

Most various did engage all fears
  And hopes,—the king made this decree;
  That, whosoe'er the man might be
That claimed the princess for his love,
He should that day be man enough
  To bear her strongly in his arms
Quite up the mountain, and again
  To bring her back,—as through all harms
And o'er steep mountains of the pain
  Of life a man must truly bear
  The woman whom he hath:—for clear
It seemed, the toil, so far, alas,
All simple strength of man did pass,
  None other could have heart to try
  But he whose love to live or die
With her was equal.

On the night
  Before that day, the common voice
  Of folk who scarcely had a choice,
So they beheld the morrow's sight,
  Between the ending well or ill
Of these, did on all sides declare
  That, unless God should take the will

To save those lovers, and prepare
  Some wondrous miracle to show
His mercy on them, by their sure
  Disaster, quickly all must know
Their way was neither good nor pure.

But, on that night, without a fear,
As though sure happiness were near,
  The two who loved vowed each to each
The extreme day left or the year
  Of life to come; and death could teach
No unknown grief to them it seemed;
But rather many sweet things dreamed
  Should be accomplished to them then:
And, on the other hand, there gleamed,
  As though from no short lives that men
Had power to trample out and end,
  The clear untroubled heaven within
Each soul, that love had made descend—
An inextinguishable part
  Of some eternity, akin
  To nothing that took change and death
Of earth: more wonderful at heart

The great resplendent secrets grew,
  That could not find a word or breath
To bear their telling, while they two
  Sat fated in the darkening world
That one night before fate: and, free,
The thoughts for which strange lives shall be
  Hereafter, entered and unfurled
Their depths and passed between them free.
And through an unrecorded hour,
  Wherein the multitudes of men,
With the amassed tyrannic power
  Of all their laws, became again
As in the ancientness, when earth
Held not one place of death or birth,—
  It came to pass indeed that they,
  With nought belonging to the day
Of common life upon them, whole
In the eternity that soul
  Did give to soul, sat quite alone,
  As a man doth the hour unknown
Before his death, in the great bare
  Unalterable midst of hell
And heaven.

And then were they aware
Of being severed from all kin,
And alien from the ill or well,
And the law making good or sin
To any creature: only they,
—Henceforth together—should begin
One new almighty spirit, free
With its own good and evil way
And power to end itself or be
For ever.
Such a distant sight
They had, beyond the daily haze
Of bounded vision, at the height
And depth of endless destiny
That love's inevitable ways
Had wrought for them,—they little knew,
That eve, how tenderly the blue,
Richer with many a memory
Out of their open hearts, gave birth
To every rapturous burning star;
Nor with what perfumed hands the earth
Made miracles of sweetness far
Into the yielding night: and, ere

The yet unbroken chains of their
  Short sundered being drew back each soul
To fill and feel the rest of fate
  This side of death, alas, this whole
Accursèd world, where lusts and hate
Have tracked and slaughtered love, lay drear
  In dews of chill tears hardening sore
  To add to cruel days one more
And not yet be consumed; while, near,
  Their own yet unattainable,
  Gleamed only fair the heaven where dwell
Love's saved ones deathless, night and day
  Itself transfigured with the spell
That took their first life's tears away.

  Ah, and the rest is strange enough
To common earth-folk, whose cold faith
  Is coined out of some bitter lie
Of their polluted lives; whose wraith
  Goes downward to the dung and dust
They worshipped in the stead of love:
  But—Love of mine—if thou or I
  Should doubt love's miracle, whose trust

Is in his heaven for which we die
Dishonoured in our lives,—then, mad
And hopeless were our hearts, and we
In all thrice wretched, and this sad
World-exile thrice a hell!
—Now She
Who came unto them on the morn
That brought their fate, and, in the ear
Of multitudes whose ready scorn
Turned to amaze, said she was near
Among a kin that held them dear,
From time ere unseen hands had torn
Their ways asunder,—to the dull
And jeering folk she seemed a crazed
Long widowed woman used to cull
Strange herbs at night time: but there blazed
At once, unshrouded, on the twain
The beauty in her and the might
Of a love-angel long in light;
And gathered on no pallid plain
By moonlit magic were the charms
She gave them: for straight into arms
Of tripled strength the lover took

His love—to win her so or look
His last upon the world that day.

O sweet and swift was the first way:
—Bearing her from the one dark place
In all God's universe where still
She was not his: winning her more
At every step; mere earthly space
And ruggedness between the chill
Man's hand that severed and the thrill
Of God's that should unite!
Grass bore
The blithe steps gratefully; and wings
Of hurrying wind, outstripping, fanned
And fretted many a mile of green
That waved with gracious murmurings
To the brink of the seeing; keen
Delicious scent was in the land;
And every little joy that sings
Close to its parent clod, unseen
In minute mystery, rang out
That morn its perfect rapturous chime:
And, far behind, the human shout

Fell faint and fainter every time,
Baffled and wavering about
The mazes of the upward way.

And then they entered on the fair
And fearful solitudes that day
And night made in the mountain,—air
Immeasurable, and light and space,
And burning breadth of heaven, and steep
Interminable slopes that face
The blue and lead up to the blue.
It was the very dream that sleep
Had oft beguiled them with, made true
And mightier far; the green sheer side
Of earth rose boundless, unbeheld
Of any living thing beside
Themselves: the equal infinite
Of heaven uncomprehended held
The other dazzling half of light,
Endless and fathomless; and both
Seemed worlds to them where they might choose
To wander out their lives and lose
Rich unrecorded days, in troth

With some indulgent death that left
The lips belovèd with the lips
That loved, and, ending them, scarce reft
More from them than, with honied theft,
Some love-sleep steals of bliss, that nips
An agonizing joy in twain.
And here they knew that they were fain
To cast away all hope and fear;
And pass unnamed from men, and near
To none affranchisement more blest
Than that first licence the mere breast
Of an untrodden earth and drear
Desired solitude did hold
To lure them to ignoble rest.

Calm was the never ending wave
Of wild mysterious wind, that rolled
Through changeless ages there,—that brought
Nor good nor evil thing and wrought
No change: and peaceful, as a grave
Without the memory of a man
Or knowledge of a god, the dim
Grey grass immeasurable ran,

Receding ever, to some rim
Where shone, all brandished in the blue,
Its coarsely golden heads; and here
It seemed indeed that God scarce knew
The hoary age of Time or where
Was ending or beginning.

And it was wonderful, yea, past
The loveliest bewildering
Of dreams, all suddenly, at last,
In such an endless fearless place—
Where was no least remembering
Of sweet or bitter—for the first
Illimitable moment's space,
To feel the loneliness of face
With yearning face, and love with love,
And passionate soul with soul that durst
All depth and height of passion.
Above
Their infinite will that moment reigned
No law, but such as the wild wills
And endless energies of storms
And seas, and all things unrestrained

Rule themselves with for aye ; and vast,
  As the most fatal force that thrills
  Through endless chaos and reforms
The earth and heavens, was all desire
  Of their two spirits—now, at last,
  In irrepressible ways to blend,
Fulfilling heaven or adding fire
  To hell—one spirit to the end.
Wherefore, indeed, face tempted face
  With a long fatal look, that wore
The haggard irresistible grace
  Of utmost yearning ; and no more
  The eager passionate heart forbore
The heart's temptation, for the sake
Of any false faith in the earth
  Left bitterly ; but sweetest lures
That, perishably perfect, take
Imperishable loves of birth
  That robs or peoples heaven, did tempt
  And take their souls.
                Lust, that endures
While only the alluring hair
  Hath the world's sun in it, exempt

From aught of the world's change; while, fair
In the world's fickle thought, the snare
Of lips and limbs and eyes doth hold
The glitter of its fading gold,—
Knoweth not wherefore they forsook
The safe returning paths that day,
And such remaining fate as lay
Among mankind, and, with a look
Mirroring the immensity
Of blue above them, mutely took
Unknown irrevocable doom
Among all endless creatures, high
As stars or lowly as the bloom
Upon the humble earth : but love
That gave an earth knew well what love
Gave heaven ; and either lover's soul
Knew to God's judgment day, the whole
Loved story of the other's soul.

So they went upward, still, to learn
The mystery of the mountain. Day
On day, they ever found some way
Higher and stranger, past return,

Leading up through the solitude
They sought. And, one by one, earth's rude
Horrific semblances, that hold
Mere changeless secrets of a love
The world has grown unworthy of,
Half fearless for the holy gold
Within them, laid by many a veil,—
Seeing, that, more and more, the might
Of love eternal did enfold
And change and beautify with light
Those wanderers.
And one day they knew
There was another wanderer too
In that fair mountain; for the pale
World-angel Death did haunt it through;
Many times, midmost of some waste
Quite pathless; or on narrowest place
Precipitous, had they even met
With wondrous and mysterious trace
Of him, that stayed the very haste
Of their freed feet, and turned the thought
Within them to a dream as yet
Beyond their bearing: and they caught,

Oft-times, some little sound of his,
Coming unearthly as a sharp
And rending cry up the abyss,
Or taken for the sudden hiss
Of a snake near them.
But at night
They heard him, when that mountain, wild
With hollow ways, became a harp
Whereon he poured the fearful might
Of an immense strange music, full
Of storms and thunders, sometimes mild
And bringing the delicious lull
Of an unearthly dream, but great,
And hundred voiced and all his own
For ever. Then they saw that lone
And mighty one—that savage mate
Of solitude; yea, once, afar,
And turned from them, and making way
Tremendous on the height where lay
The snowy shroud of moon and star;
Then once again; then many a time
Descried they him, scarce nigh, in pose
Of thinking thoughts that no man knows;

Or fearful in his haste to climb
  Some distant craggy way of peak
  And precipice, hung between hell
And heaven. At length, spite of the sun,
  Nigh every day they saw him well,
  Crouched sullen, or in hideous freak
Out on the sunny ledges sheer
And glittering. Scarce he seemed to shun
  The sight of them; though dark and lost
  And heedless seemed he if he crost
Their path; but, now and then, would peer
  Intently at them from behind
  Some rugged hiding, with no mind
To bring to pass on them his change
  In any bitter sort.
                                    And so,
They were a distance great and strange
Above the world: they knew no more
  The shadowy place of it, below
  The silver of the closing clouds
That spread beneath them like a floor;
  Slowly too, had they felt that shrouds
Of fearless sweet forgetfulness,

Gathering all within, did hide
And shut off from them, and make less
And less the knowledge of their tried
Hard being in the past. Their love
Was growing with them as the light
Made in the sun's clear central mine,
That long hath burnt a way through shred
Of vapoury veil; so they did move
And live in it, and, in the bright
Transfigurement thereof, did shine
Wondrously each on each, and wed
Their perfect emanating bliss
In ways of an eternal kiss.

I cannot find a subtle sound
Of words, in which it can be said,
How the great tides of glory roll,
Over some unperceived last bound,
Inward upon the open soul
For ever. Softly, while each way
And want and manner of the earth
—Disused, relinquished,—fell away
And ceasèd from them, did they change,

Scarcely with dying or with birth—
Into the endless element
Begun within, the day there went
The first love-lightning, swift and strange,
Between them, in that lower land
Where love's elect are a small band.

Yea, even as now their feet had made
Ever an upward way that led
From the dull earth, from the cold shade,
Ever toward some higher height,
Where yet their spirits should be fed
Upon unearthlier air and light,
And yet more perfectly fulfil
The high and deep law of their love,—
Yea, even as now they went and still
Found there was love and light above,
And shining changes yet to teach
Their souls, and loftier joys to reach—
So, when at length, upon the last
Chill summit of the earth they stood,
And all the earthliness had passed
Fairly away from them, a good

And never-ending sight they had
Of heaven and higher heaven; and, free,
With winged feet that were bright and glad
To walk upon the silver sea
Of airy cloud and air, no stay
They made, but upward a great way
Went ever, loving ever, yea,
And drawing nigh to Love.
And now,
Alas, that neither I nor thou
Can know the full and perfect fate
They have; nor where at length they are;
Nor for what fairer thing they wait,
If yet they have not come to be
All things divinely.—But yon star,
That doth not seem indeed so far,
Hath all this lore; yea, and each free
Undefiled flower in the grass
Knows and sees plainly in the glass
Of heaven: and we know not, alas!

Yet shall their fate, whate'er it be,
Come very soon on me and thee!

WOULD I might go far over sea,
  My Love, or high above the air,
And come to land or heaven with thee,
Where no law is and none shall be
  Against beholding the most rare
Strange beauty that thou hast for me.

Alas, for, in this bitter land,
Full many a written curse doth stand
  Against the kiss thy lips should bear;
Against the sweet gift of thy hand;
  Against the knowing that thou art fair,
  And too fond loving of thy hair!

CHAITIVEL;

OR, THE

LAY OF LOVE'S UNFORTUNATE.

FAIR yellow murderess, whose gilded head
  Gleaming with deaths; whose deadly body white,
Writ o'er with secret records of the dead;
  Whose tranquil eyes, that hide the dead from sight
Down in their tenderest depth and bluest bloom;
  Whose strange unnatural grace; whose prolonged youth—
Are for my death now and the shameful doom
  Of all the man I might have been in truth——

Your fell smile, sweetened still, lest I might shun
  Its lingering murder, with a kiss for lure,
Is like the fascinating steel that one
  Most vengeful in his last revenge and sure
The victim lies beneath him, passes slow,
  Again and oft again before his eyes
And over all his frame, that he may know
  And suffer the whole death before he dies.

Will you not slay me? Stab me; yea, somehow
  Deep in the heart: say some foul word to last
And let me hate you as I love you now:
  Oh, would I might but see you turn and cast
That false fair beauty that you e'en shall lose,
  And fall down there and writhe about my feet,
The crooked loathly viper I shall bruise
  Through all eternity!—
                    Nay; kiss me, Sweet!

CHAITIVEL;

OR, THE

LAY OF LOVE'S UNFORTUNATE.

Ladies and lovers, may ye dwell
  In joy; yea, now and after me;
And, for all I shall sing or tell,
Hold me but one who loveth well,
  And singeth of mere joy to see
His lady's golden loveliness,—
Yea, joyeth, and may scarce repress
The song he hath for every tress
  Her hand hath braided or set free—
The rush of rapturous words that break
Frail wings against his lips and take
  A songless death, for mere delight
  In that fresh miracle of white
And perfect red and perfect gold

Each new day brings him to behold
  Renewed and yet unchanged in her.
  Whence are the rosy seas that stir
With richly glowing wave of thin
Ethereal fire, alway within,
  Alway about her heart—all day
Flooding the extreme flower of lip
And finger-tip and bosom-tip,—
  As summer, flooding in such way
  Earth, air and heaven, will seem to stay
Gathered up richly in the last
  And least of the last rose?—O whence
Is all her wonder, never past,
Nor ever dwelt with and possest
  Quite through, bewildering the sense
  With loving, looking and suspense
Of loving;—shapeless shades and swift
Transfigurement of heavens that drift
  Ever with glory giving place
  To glory on her form and face?—
Yea, infinite of change and light
And wide uncomprehended sight
  Seems every way his lady's grace,—

As seemeth to the day and night
  Some infinite world of flowers, transformed
By unseen wands of wind. And he,
Beholding, loves; but may not see
Or know whence aught of her may be:
  Only, beholding, he hath formed,
Ah, many a song for very love
Of her and wonder. But, above,
  —Yea, quite beyond the rapturous days
He leads with her, he thinketh well
  Some heaven with fair untrodden ways
Shall ever be for him to dwell
  Rejoicing in her, learning praise
More passionate of her, winning whole
Immortal knowledge of her soul.

Ladies and lovers, will ye see
How gold hair hath its perjury?
  And how the lip may twice or thrice
Undo the soul; and how the heart
  May quite annul the heart's own price
Given for many a goodly part
  Of heaven? How one love shall be fair,

And whole and perfect in the rare
Great likeness of an angel,—yea,
And how another, golden-miened,
With lovely seeming and sweet way,
Shall come and be but as a fiend
To tempt and drag the soul away—
And all for ever? Listen well:
This is a lay of heaven and hell:
Listen, and think how it shall be
With you in love's eternity.

Some age ago, Love's splendid lures
Through the enchanted world made fair
Each woman's soft enamouring snare;
And the contagion that endures
Among men's hearts spread everywhere
Love's ailing that love only cures;
And, far as the unblemished fire
Flooded down joyous from the sun
Caused rapturous living and desire
Unearthly in the earth, not one
Of fair mankind was free to shun
The sudden endless fate of flame

Caught in the hazard of a look
Crossing a kindled look. The same
Frail human life it was that shook
With the immortal burning soul
Of love traversing it, consumed
With bearing inwardly the whole
Of some celestial joy, or sole
—In fair midst of the world that bloomed
Or withered—through the long sharp throe
Of some inexplicable woe
Reaching out to a shoreless sea
Of sadness after death. The earth
Was beautiful with flower and tree,
And full of the delicious mirth
And low soft endless jubilee
Of bird and nameless creature free
To feel the sun; and, where the grave
Saddened and broke the last year's green,
There most was this year's summer brave
With glorious flower and fresh with keen
New scent. And men and women, thrilled
With their own passionate thoughts unseen,
Went fair about the fair world, filled

With wondrous joy or misery
Killing them at the heart; beheld
The sun, and looked upon the sky,
And saw the flowers, and felt go by
The summer; and were not changed, but held
Their secret of eternity
Within them. And the earth was glad,
Whether the heart was blithe or sad.

But Sarrazine, of whom I sing,
Had shut her soul up from each thing
That once with all her soul she knew
Sweet in the earth, bright in the blue;
And, joyless, in the midst between
Fair blue of heaven and green earth's green,
Lived now this lovely Sarrazine
With passionate thinking and unknown
Most secret flowering of her lone
And infinite beauty. All amazed
She was, and fearfully she gazed
Into each dismal future year,
The while it ceased not that a tear,
Born of her thought right wearily,

Found its way backward to the drear
Dead ashes of some memory
In a sweet fatal reckless past
Love had made recklessly and cast
Against her soul.
She did not die,
But dreamed and lived, and bade the gray
Of grieving, more and more each day,
Gather around and steal away
Her hidden fairness, that was bloom
More white and wondrous in that tomb
Where the sun touched it not, and sight
Should never worship, and delight
Flower not of it day or night.

The slow cloud found it sweet to rest
Over each shadow-haunted tower
Of her lone castle, and to remain
Low brooding over that domain
Of deep autumnal wood and plain
And mirroring lake that she possest;
The sun and summer owned no flower
Down in the deep and wayward ways

Ruined and lost about her bower,
Whose desolation was the nest
Of a strange plaintive bird with crest
Of tarnished fiery feathers. Haze
Of changeless morn and noon was blue
Above the still blue of the lake,
Where, year by year, some long dream grew
More and more wonderful, and threw
A stranger spell over wild brake
And dripping mile of sallow sedge—
Where the dark bittern and the crake
Answered with lone unearthly cry,
Or spectral, on the oozy edge,
Some tall grey egret with wide eye
Stood slumbering. Not a troubled thought
Of toiling in the world, or deeds
Of living men, was ever brought
To break such magic as dreams wrought
In that dim region; but the reeds,
And redolent snakelike flowers, and weeds
Trailed in the wave, and songless bird,
With many a shadow thinly seen
And many a strange unseen thing heard

To wander up and down between
The desolate sedges with drear sound—
All were become unearthly, bound
In the enchanting solitude
Of some vast supernatural mood
Of sadness. All had learned the heart
Of Sarrazine; and every sore
Bewailing thought of hers was part
Of burdens that the silent things
Of wave and fen and feather bore,
On languid leaves and drooping wings,
In the blue stillness more and more
The haunt of cloud and dream.

And for his sake—who quite possest,
In short blind life upon the earth,
The whole irrevocable gift
Of her sweet body's passionate worth—
Whose soul was ever strong and swift
To seek her shaken soul and wrest
Some irremediable word
Out of its troubled speech to drift
Onward eternal and be heard

Among the destinies,—for him,
  She now had given up to grief,
To let grief ruin it and dim
  And waste it as worms do a leaf,
  The rich continual flowering
Of each white unregarded limb,
  Yea, and the whole of that rich thing,
Her woman's loveliness, that love
  Would perfect secretly and bring
To many a marble grace above
His wont. O how grief slew each day
  With deadliest remembering
  Of some first day the cruel past
Held golden with joy torn away
  For ever! Snake-like, how he cast
  His sickly and bewildering coil
About her life, holding his prey,
Her heart, with fierce fang of regret,
  And making poisoned thought to spoil
Her desolate fairness with lone fret!

Now she would weary out the days,
  Joylessly looking on the white

Slim wonder that she was, whose praise
  Henceforth must be omitted quite
Out of men's praising mouths; whose sight
Should ne'er strike sudden with amaze
  One other heart fain to have crost
That solitude, where she must be
  Evermore as a flower lost
Or nameless unto men. To see
  The wild white lilies, passionless
And lonely, wasted in the rank
Green shadowy shallows of the bank,
  Was to see many a loveliness—
No more rejected and left out,
  As a thing none cared to possess
Of love and time—than, past all doubt,
  Her joyless form and face were now
Till death. Was the world whole without
  One need of her, one thought of how
Love prospered making her—one look
  At the short perfect miracle
His passionate hands wrought when they took
The rare sweet elements, the fine
  And delicate fires, and wove the spell

Of her rich being? Did days yet shine,
And men love boundlessly and well
In the fair world, beyond that cell
Of grey thoughts shutting out the sun
Her life seemed brought to? yea, since none
Set living heart upon her more,
And all she was and all she bore,
Of rare and wonderful lay known
To the worms only left alone
With faded secrets in the core
Of dead men's hearts?

Time was so bare,
—Her heart at solitary feast
Of sorrow sitting unreleast
For ever, wasting slow the hair
Of gold, the plenteous form of white
Unconquerable flower, through night
And day, that emptied year and year
Of sullied summers, drawing near
To death scarce more a winter;—yea,
And one last chosen tomb seemed, day
And night, so little comforted

With summer given or true tear shed—
There might have been—her heart now said
  Sometimes all softly—even for him,
That earlier lover, lightly slain
  Without the touch of her for dim
Delicious dreaming after vain,
  Void life, the guiltless recompense
Of more love than he sought to save
  His soul; yea, though he had gone hence,
Telling the worms they should but have
  Hair's gold that once had been his bed,
  And dust that love for once had wed
To his glad dust, when death made her
Some next year's spoil! O who would stir
  In sleep down there, and think he missed
  Aught of the faultless mouth that kissed
His life all through? For, verily,
  —He who had all—was not his day,
E'en to death softened endlessly
With love, filled to the full and more
  With sweet of hers? And, where he lay,
Was not the grave o'erbrimmed with store
Of perfect memories and rich ore

Of a life rich in love? And, now,
It seemed all bitter to avow
That one most gracious should have gone
Uncheered to death, who had lived on
Right rapturously, if once his brow
Had felt her lips; if once his hand
Had revelled on her, and his heart
Filled itself with one lovely part
Of loveliness, the rotting sand
Of time alone should use with kiss
Joyless for ever. Would not this—
To weigh the lost wealth of her hair
Once in his hand, as one might poise
Some weight of gold—have seemed right fair
To him, amid the few sad joys
He thought it well to die for? Yea,
And now the whole sweet, that he lay
Evermore thirsting for, was there
At waste for ever, out of care
Of any; and no man came back
To call it his.

And, since to her
No man returned; since no more lack

Of her gave any strength to stir
The very grave-stone and come back;
And he whose soul's least word of love
Seemed a love-fetter strong enough
To bind eternity to whole
Eternity,—since now his soul
Having content of her, or quite
Forgetting, left her, as a thing
Not owned, and never jealous sting,
Caused him to care now, day or night,
What chance might happen to the white
Unblemished beauty or the heart
His empire:—ah, as houseless wraiths
And unhoused creeping beasts would glide
Back to a house the day he died
Who cast them forth,—so, from each part
Of her annulled past, full of faiths
Abjured and fruitless loves and loss,
There came back to her heart the host
Of memories comfortless; the ghost
Of every lover now might cross
Its threshold when he would, to scare
And grieve her with his tears, or bare

The great wound in his heart, or make
Long threat of unknown things for sake
  Of some forgotten heedless word.

  It seemed now as a sad thing heard
But yesterday, how, bearing still
Fair vow of hers, wherefrom the will
  Of other love had wrenched her, yea,
Relying ever on each fair
  Uncancelled word, and, night and day,
Bound, with her gift of golden hair,
  To hold hers only heart and hand,
  For ever,—one in Paynim land
Died loving her. The intense flower
  Of waving strange-leaved trees that sang
  His dirge with voices wild and soft,
Wafted her perfume that had power
  To shake her heart; warm air, that rang
  With ends of unknown singing, oft
Broke in upon her, as though space
  Of cold climes and cold seas between
  Were dwindling, and she should have seen
That fair unconsecrated place,

Golden in sunlight, green in shade
Of many a palm and mighty blade
Of monstrous herb.
Yea, these were three
Whose lives and deaths were hers; and she
Had only given good to one;
And all were with her now, to share
And haunt her thoughts quite to the bare
Lone end of living. There was none
Among sweet women whose ripe heart,
Full of the perfect precious part
Of many a love, was a deep tomb
Where fair dead lay in goodly gloom
More royally than these, whose fate
Was filled and ended in her, lay
In her proud heart, disconsolate
And lonely, turning from the day
Into its own rich grieving gray.

But in the separate place that death
Had found for him, to rest from life,
To dream upon it, or to wait,
Each of her lovers held the breath

Of his strong dauntless spirit rife
With memories; or content with late
Fair kisses on his mouth; or sure
Of heaven because of some sweet lure
Of looks or pledge or perfect vow
She made him,—doubting her not his
For ever in fair destinies.

He who ne'er felt upon his brow
The perfect blessing of her kiss,
Stayed his long thirst with thinking how
Some early and far-reaching smile,
That looked on many a distant mile
Of golden promise, seemed to bind
His love to follow her and find
Dim outskirts of her life to cling
With solace in; and, where the chill
And changeless dark spread covering
His patient soul, he thought it still
Her shadow on him; and a thrill
That was not joyless turned the sting
Of death.
And he who, in the fair

Rich Paynim place, with the ripe glare
  Of foreign summers gilding palm
  And poisonous fruit about him, calm
And mighty, rusted in red steel—
Not merely barren did he feel
  Death's prison and the silent gloom
  Around him; but, within, the tomb
Was opulent with glimmering gold;
  For the slim tress that once was hid
Upon his heart, was grown to fold
On fold that many times had rolled
  About him; and he lay amid
The splendours of it, and thought well
That he should have her soul for hell
  Or heaven.

              But he who had all sweet
Latest and longest of her,—day
And night and many a year he lay,
  Enthralled, past knowing cold or heat
  Or hearing thunder or the feet
Of armies, in a long deep dream
  Of her sweet body, full of joy
And magical amaze and gleam

Of endless excellence: there nought
  Might reach his spirit or destroy
Its passionate raptures of long thought,
—Save only if, beneath God's sky,
  One other creature should draw nigh
To touching her whom his soul bought.

Tranquil, and holding it enow
  Each of them had his hope or bliss
  Or memory of her; and with this
He lay alone there,—as I trow,
Thinking that she was only his.

—O men and women, Love is king
Upon the earth; summer and spring
  Will serve him in the year to come
With all new rapture, when the blast
Of many a long-drawn autumn day,
  Made golden with fair thought and dumb
Remembering of the perfect past,
Shall have swept utterly away
  The dry dead leaves of summer and spring

That spent themselves with worshipping
His latest godhead perfectly :
His realms are all the lands that lie
Beneath yon distant unknown sky—
Where only freed souls go unseen
To different dooms : his are the green
Of grass, the blue of seas, the red
Of passionate roses,—each frail life
Of rose and bird and slight thing rife
With sunlight is but sweetly led
By him to its sweet life and death.
But, more than all, while ye have breath
And rosy relic of the rose
Born with you—men and women, lo,
Your rich eternal hearts that grow
Like widening flowers that cannot close
Their leaves—are Love's, to turn and use,
And work upon as he may choose.

Do ye not feel how love pursues
Your full hearts ever with his new
Inconstant summer—to convert
And steal them from the thing they knew

Their own,—to cause them to desert
  Their piteous memories and the few
Fond faiths of perfect years? Alas,
He careth not how he may hurt
  The dead, or trouble them that wait
In heaven, so he may bring to pass
  Ever some new thing passionate
And sweet upon the earth: his sun
  Hath need of you; and, if he takes
  Last year's spoiled roses and remakes
Red summer with them, shall he shun
To steal your soft hearts every one,
  O men and women, to enrich
His fair new transitory reign?

Are ye mere flowers to love again
  With each fresh summer, knowing not which
Hath had the ripest of your bloom?—
Nay, but, for you, there is a doom
  For ever making in the fair
Unalterable world above
The blue, unknown to your new love,
Irrevocable in your own

Sweet word :—O women, have a care
What if two come to claim your hair
Of God ?—what if two shall have thrown
Their strong arms round your body, quite
Belonging with an equal right
To each for ever ?

Would the place,
That bore so long the lovely grace
And wayward grief of Sarrazine,
Had never lost the tender spell
Of the half death that seemed to dwell
Out of time there on what was green
Of leaf and what was grey, on bird
And sleepless wraith ;—would none had stirr'd
The gloomy magic making there
Some lone eternity to scare
Untoward striving fates and save
Her soul and body in one grave
Of safe sleep unresponsive.

Yea,
For, at the last, I cannot say

What thing fell on her, when my lay
Hath told you of this Chaitivel,
Whom his fate made to love her well
And seek her, knowing nought of those
That held her on the other side
Of death. May this man's woe abide
With God for ever, among woes
Some heaven of his—some mystic kiss
Of Mary sweet shall turn to bliss!

It may be, still, for many a year
Sarrazine counted tear on tear
To soften death unto the dead;
And many a thing, that they might hear
Sometimes all faintly in the bed
Of earth and leaves about them, said
—To touch them, if she might, and set
Some late desire of her at fret
Within them;—and, if, day or night,
The grave had let them, fair and white,
And far more wondrous as she was
Than in their memory, she would quite
Have hailed that one who should have earned

To come to her in any pause
Of death, with words that long had burned
Her breast, and love that had long turned
To fair earth near their hearts. But now,
The graves grew winterly, and how
It fared with them in that long sleep
She knew not: and they lay and dreamed,
Each one his dream, that he should keep
And hold her his for evermore.

Then Love, who rules the bright world, deemed
That, all too well indeed, she bore
Such sorrow for the dead who seemed
No longer worth one's caring for;
And, so, I ween, he sent one day
This Chaitivel—who was a man
Most goodly, full of all the gay
And thrilling summer-time that ran
Once more with rapture through the earth.

Alas, for her who gave him birth,
And put indeed, upon his face
And form, somewhat of her own grace

To make men love him, and her smile
Like magic in his mouth! No guile
  Was in her; and she saw him fair
And stayed with him, maybe a while,
  For the mere joy to see his hair
Grown lovely with youth's golden crown,
  And to behold his perfect bloom,
As of a flower that she had sown:
And, having loved indeed and known
  His heart, she left him to the doom
Another woman's love should make:—
  Alas, for her down in the tomb!

Was there no little deadly snake
Curled on the threshold, for her sake,
  To save him with its fiery fang?
Nay, but he entered; and this sad
Too lovely Sarrazine, all clad
  In clinging robes, with voice that sang
The piteous music of lone thought
  Most luringly, is unto him,
  As 'twere some fatal serpent, slim
And gracious that hath softly caught

His soul twining about it close,
Sinking it into ways of woes
Past saving.
But his coming brought
The new strange miracle of love
Upon her; and her heart, estranged
From all that once had seemed enough,
Sprang sudden at him as a bird
Breaking a snare, or as a free
Blithe butterfly some second birth
Lifts in the air, no more to be
The joyless worm it was on earth.

And, lo—once, when the night was sore,
And the world, for a faint space, bore
The bitter nearness of its dead
Unwontedly, and every pore
Of the chill graves seemed free to shed
The white and ghastly dews long bred
In lone laborious agonies
Of those on whom the death-sleep lies
Uneasily,—she said or sang,
Mourning one last while, words that rang

With their full farewell in the ear
Of those her listening lovers,—clear
  With poignant doom of anguish, straight
  Awakening them to fight with fate
For ever.

            Wheresoe'er ye be,
  Forgetting or remembering me,
She sang,— I bid you now farewell:
  Surely, I think, you shall not tell
  Hard things of me in heaven or hell:
  I pray God, that the grave be sweet
  About you,—yea, and, if ye keep
  Some sort of love of me through sleep,—
  May the worms cease not to repeat
  My sweet words lest ye wake and weep:
  Only, if before God we meet,
  I pray you, lovers, that no more
  Ye tell me of the things I swore;
  I loved you: may all death be sweet,
  And peace be with you evermore.

  O lover, who had all delight

In winning me,—'tis many a night,
Since, through the sweet hours lovingly,
I lay by you and you by me;
And now, perchance, if you should see
My flowerless beauty, loved by you,
Wasted to white and kissed all through
With sorrow,—scarcely might I seem
Your love of lost days or your dream
Down there in charmed sleep; and, to-day,
Why need I take your dream away?
—Sleep on; and think of me, I say,
Whatever sweet thing lets you lie
Content with death; I have made rich
Your grave indeed with tear and sigh;
And, many a night hath been, through which
I prayed to God that I might die
And go down softly to you. Dear,
I do believe you would not hear;
You would not know or feel me near;
And, though I kissed you, till you saw
My wan face, I should never draw
One warm kiss from your lips, or thaw

The hard ice at your heart! What song
Of mine hath ever reached you? Long
Mad nights I lay awake, and wrought
My sorrowing heart to such a plaint
Of lone imploring words, I thought
Some of them surely must have brought
Your soul quite to me, roused with faint
Most piteous murmurings that made way
Through earth and leaves to where you lay.
And, if indeed death had not set
Some cold and very mighty spell
Upon you, making you forget
My face, yea, and your love, to dwell
With some unearthly dream, or rest
Dreamless and joyless in his breast
For ever,—O you had not failed
To steal up somehow, wearying night,
Death, dreams, and mystic ways of sight
And sound, till one fair path availed
To make you known to me. And now,
It seems we both who made the vow
Of love have fallen on either side

Somewhat away; and I, who chide
Thee never for it, hold, maybe,
At length the greater memory.

'Tis as though both of us had died
I think; and that lone grave of thine
Is scarce a harder place to pine
And gnaw the inmost heart and shed
Unsolaced tears in, than this bed,
Lonely and waste and white, where grief
Hath held me buried, years wrought sore
With sorrowing. No fair hope made brief
The agony it was, no more
To see one loved face bring relief
Of love: the hollow darkness bore
No dream to comfort; and the sight
Of the yet fair unruined white
Of my forlorn lost beauty pained
My spirit, showing me but chained
To so much more of death. Farewell:
Memory or sleep shall hold their spell
Unchanged upon you, till the name
Or thought of Sarrazine shall dwell



No more with you ; and though, at last,
She winneth any sweet the past
Knew nothing of, she will not cast
The tenderness of many a day
Quickly and utterly away:
And, though quite other she became,
Surely the grave will feel the same.

But he who, living, had possest
Her peerless body—who, till then,
Rapt in sweet thought, had never known
How death grew chill and cold earth prest
And walled him in, nor felt the stone
Lie heavy between him and men,—
But he who, giving his soul's best
Of heaven and God's eternal good,
Had won that woman to be his
And change not: in mere solitude
Of death he woke, without a kiss,
And knew that fate was false ;—the hiss
Of a fell serpent seemed to bring
The words that woke him to his ear,

Bitter with endless echoing,
And one long agony stretched clear
Out to his soul's eternity.
Then, in the hollow of the tomb,
Where his speech thundered into doom,
He answered her:

Woman, said he,
Why have you been so false with me?
Was it the waste thought of a day
I gave to you?—was it to win
A wanton hour, I cast away
My untried heavens and slew straightway
My greater unknown self within?
Was it to shrivel, with the sin
Of mere rich revelling to dull
My fallen soul once beautiful
Because of love, sharing the hell
Of harlots, that I chose to sell
Usurious fate so much of vast,
Yea boundless, that lay known between
Me and God only? So, at last,
Not half way into doom, I find

This fails me,—this that should have been
All heaven, this love that was to blind
So richly, I should ne'er have seen
The depth I dwelt in nor the height
I forfeited ; now, all behind,
At once I see as many kings
As golden seeming days, with light
And lustre fading on them ; bright
Imperial crowns and goodly things
Fall from them hastily ; they sit
Dishonoured spectres of me, bare
In the bare past, abhorring it.
If I could go back and repair
One hour, one moment, to make fair
Eternity,—O I should seem
Not quite denuded of some dream
To keep my soul unshamed before
The fiends and angels : but, indeed,
I am too distant from that shore
Of life already ; and no seed
Is left for sowing any more.
Henceforth, a weed among much weed
Of foundered love and life, my soul

Shall drift upon dark waves and waste
Upon the ceaseless seas that roll
Through the lone Infinite.
Ah, haste
To live thy false life through, that I
May have that wrecked thing I did buy
—A body for a soul!—for mine
I think you shall be, since I hold
A vow for every hair of gold,
And destinies and all divine
Unalterable things of old
Witnessed your pale frail body bound
To me immutably.—Ah, white
And worthless blossom, for delight
Of the lips only: Ah, the round
Quite faultless fashioning of slim
And sinuous side and shapely limb:
Ah, the delirious abyss
Of the mouth fainting in a kiss:—
Ah, all this, yea, though merely this,—
Can make a goodly hell for him
Who loses heaven. And I grow sick
Of waiting since I am no more

Than one to kiss your bosom sore
For ever. Wherefore now the thick
Polluted darkness? Wherefore gloom
And lonely wakings in the tomb?
Sin all, and, as you are, come quick
And share my sin down here. How long
Have I endured to dream among
The worms in faithful wretchedness—
Sure you would come and lie along
Beside me and be sweet no less
Than I believed you? You would bless
Some fond way for it all, and set
Your mouth upon my mouth and let
The dreamed-of heaven begin: and, quite
So noble was I with my faith,—
But for these sad words, I felt bite
The ground through to me—O I might
Have ceased not trusting the sweet wraith
Of word and kiss and memory,
Of what I left you, endlessly!
Here, in my place among the things
That change not, I myself, in all,
A changeless spirit past recall,

With life's supreme rememberings
Unshaken in me,—here I feel
And shudder at your shameful word.
O woman, think you no fates heard,
When, passionately, beyond repeal,
You bade them know you mine and seal
Your life and death so? See the blue—
The sight you have up there with you
Most near to heaven,—and, if you can,
Believe there is a God to let
You change the word you would forget,
And quite revoke the doom a man
Hath lived and died in! Change; and yet
You cannot change, but earth and sky
And death will keep you mine: and I—
Do not I live for ever?

And it befell, another day,
When earth, well ravished of the gay
Turbulent summer, fell to swoon
Under the perfume of the noon,—
That Sarrazine, now rich at heart

With love's fond thinking, felt a part
  Of tender pity that must go
And find the grave out there beyond
  So many a sea, where, lone and low,
Beneath the palms, that Pharamond
  Lay buried, with his love of her,
  And bound as though he might not stir,
In meshes of soft growing gold.
And him, believing death must hold
  So rigorously his heart and hands
  That no fair singing in those lands
Had ever soothed him,—now she named;
And, murmuring softly of him, framed
  Her last thought of him in a song;
Singing it idly to the birds,
  And finding as she went along
Mere wanton music in the words:

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Hath any loved you well, down there,
  Summer or winter through?
Down there, have you found any fair

Laid in the grave with you?
Is death's long kiss a richer kiss
Than mine was wont to be —
Or have you gone to some far bliss
And quite forgotten me?

What soft enamouring of sleep
Hath you in some soft way?
What charmed death holdeth you with deep
Strange lure by night and day?
—A little space below the grass,
Out of the sun and shade;
But worlds away from me, alas,
Down there where you are laid?

My bright hair's waved and wasted gold,
What is it now to thee —
Whether the rose-red life I hold
Or white death holdeth me?
Down there you love the grave's own green,
And evermore you rave
Of some sweet seraph you have seen
Or dreamt of in the grave.

There you shall lie as you have lain,
  Though in the world above,
Another live your life again,
  Loving again your love:
Is it not sweet beneath the palm?
  Is not the warm day rife
With some long mystic golden calm
  Better than love and life?

The broad quaint odorous leaves like hands
  Weaving the fair day through,
Weave sleep no burnished bird withstands,
  While death weaves sleep for you;
And many a strange rich breathing sound
  Ravishes morn and noon:
And in that place you must have found
  Death a delicious swoon.

Hold me no longer for a word
  I used to say or sing:
Ah, long ago you must have heard
  So many a sweeter thing:

For rich earth must have reached your heart
  And turned the faith to flowers;
And warm wind stolen, part by part,
  Your soul through faithless hours.

And many a soft seed must have won
  Soil of some yielding thought,
To bring a bloom up to the sun
  That else had ne'er been brought;
And, doubtless, many a passionate hue
  Hath made that place more fair,
Making some passionate part of you
  Faithless to me down there.

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But Pharamond heard that sweet sound,
  As the one strange thing waited for
  Through death; and, waking at the sore
Inconstant words, his hands unwound
The shining chain and tress that bound
  His limbs; and, in the glorious gloom
  Of that unconsecrated tomb,

He rose up, dumb and mighty,—pale
And terrible in blood-stained mail,
  And the gold on him as a belt,—
  He rose up,—a great soul that felt
Death ended ere a word from God:
And, going forth, he once more trod
  The waste ways of the human earth;
  And, terrible, and giving birth
To wide dismay, he crossed all lands,
Mountains and forests, and the sands
  Of deserts, and the pathless seas,
  And where suns burnt or snows did freeze
The summer,—going back to take
Her soul for vows she could not break.

And yet again, the last rich eve
  —Ere, for this Chaitivel, whom woe
Lay waiting for, she thought to leave
  The past for ever, yea, and go
  Through earths and heavens that ne'er should
    know
Other than her new love of her,—

Fearing not that the dead should stir
  Nor fate remember,—as they stayed,
Having used up their words and sighed
  To soften hours that yet delayed
Their souls from mingling to divide
  No more for ever,—Sarrazine,
Making her voice sad as might be
Some bird's last singing in the tree
  It nested in, said:
                    As I lean
This way upon your bosom, love,
Dreaming how it shall be above,
  —Yea, when we go from star to star,
Finding innumerable ways
  To heaven,—a little thought flies far
Behind me, to the piteous days
Of one whom no soft memory stays,
  Maybe, from cursing me down there
  To death—who might have made life fair
  And death less bitter, with one care,
One fond angelic word: O you,
  Whose love quite governs me and finds
  No will in me but your will binds

And turns it all to serving you—
You might have hated, if you knew
How I was sterner than the death
That gave him ease of the last breath,
Watching him hollow out his grave
In his deep boyish love of me!
I had a thousand ways to save
And strengthen him and make him flee;
Nay, but I rather chose to see
His passionate face from day to day
Consuming near me, knowing well
The different thoughts that made their prey
His heart, having a word to say
—A word unsaid yet!—ah, what spell
Of peace should I delight to weave
Over his grave there! I would take
The very waste the autumns leave
Upon it, thinking, for his sake
Who lies there, no one stays to grieve,
And I would change it into flowers
Forced up and fostered in my heart,
So I might soften the least part
Of death, and make him quite forgive

And never hate me for the hours
  That made death sweeter than to live.

Ah, love, but, now, I feel, as though
  I may forget all this, and say
  It was another woman, yea,
And not this Sarrazine; for, so
Your love hath changed me, I may throw
  The past into a grave, and shrink
  From ever looking o'er the brink
To see the dead in it and see
A mouldering form of one like me.

And he who never had a joy
  In life because of her,—he heard
Quite plainly; and she did destroy
  His slender hope with every word.
And, in the silence, his soul prayed
  That she might never take away
  The little joy it was to stay
Not far off in the place she made
Her heaven, to steal there unbetrayed,
And only see her from some shade.

But that night, ere they bade farewell,
A fear of unknown sadness fell
  Between them; and her lover went
To wait for joy, with such a heart
  As if an omen had been sent
Sorrow would come to take joy's part.

And when he sought her the next morn,
Lo, there was one who sat forlorn
  In the room with her,—a mute, pale,
Uncertain semblance of a man
Dreary and wasted past the span
  Of mortal sorrow; with a frail
Still passionate look he haunted her,
As though his pain changed with each stir
  Her hand or body made;—and, lo,
When, fearful, with a voice that burned
  His heart, he asked concerning him,
And why he came to her,—she turned
  And trembled, looking to and fro,
  And said, indeed, it was not so;

Only a chill mist seemed to dim
Her sight; but surely none was there
Beside himself and her. Then, straight
That other answered him from where
He stood: a voice lent by mere fate
It seemed to be, and, thin as air,
The void form seemed to vacillate,
As though sound shook it through and through:
—O lover, loved of her whom I
Must love unloved for ever,—you
Have nought to hate me for; e'en death
Found little he might purify,
When he divided the last sigh
I gave her with an earthly breath;
And now I have long learnt to take
Content in ways that could not break
Your peace or hers: none hindereth
My soul from loving of her still:
I pray God keep her from the chill
Of seeing me; and only this—
Which he hath granted for my bliss
Shall all suffice me—to traverse
Quite after her his universe

And dwell in the enchanted place
Her shadow filleth with her grace:
  Do thou not grudge me this I pray;
  And this she cannot take away.

The phantom flickered as a flame
  Blown blue and rent about by wind;
It seemed that every word became
A second agony like death
  Racking a soul caught and confined
In the strained film of some last breath;
But, when the utterance ceased, the same—
  A cheerless wraith of form and face
  Shrinking into the room's far place
Of shade—that semblance did abide
  Before the living man who held
That living woman for his bride:
And still when, stricken with amaze,
He said: that other hath his gaze
  Upon thee and but now he held
The speech thou must have heard, she grew
As one whom many deaths pursue,
  Pale and affrighted, but averred

She nothing saw neither had heard
At all one speaking.
And, behold,
As they sat speechless through the day
The spirit of the boy did stay
Saddening them both and making cold
Their hearts; he stirred not from the gloom
Of the far corner of the room,
Crouched like a phantom in a tomb.

But a more fearful thing befell
Ere night; and they have done full well
To call this man the Chaitivel—
The wretched one.
For when, at eve,
He went to her, and did believe
God and her love for evermore
Had power to make her his,—before
He could have taken her or laid
A trembling hand on her,—there past
One between her and him. A blast
Brought him in fearfully and made

Unearthly winter chill the place;
A torn grave garment seemed the last
Earth-relic on him; form and face
Were mysteries where no man could trace
A part of former man,—within,
Without, he was become what sin
His soul invented; for, intense,
He bore the hell of it. And this
Was he who thought to buy the bliss
Of holding one frail woman his
For ever, yea, at the expense
And loss of half his soul. Mere flame
His thought seemed as he stood between,
Finding a voice that might have been
A man's: and then, in God's great name,
He said:— Touch not her body, thou!
Mine only hath it been; and now
I come and hold her for her vow
Mine only!

Then he took her, fair
And deathly, fainting in the clutch
Of his grim darkness, with her hair
Sweeping the ground, and all her bare

Delicious beauty free from touch
Borne desolately. Her lover there
Could find no way to strive at all
With that appalling shape of dim
Illimitable darkness :—him
No sword reached ; but the blow did fall
On Sarrazine : then, with a yell
Unearthly, which no tongue could tell
The horror of, that spectre fled
Bearing the body of her dead,
Dragging it inward to his hell
For ever.

But her soul did stay :
Amazed with knowledge, and aghast
To see, that moment and too late,
The real eternities and vast
Terrific truths of love and fate.

The Wretched one sank down, and lay
Knowing and suffering no more,
As though he struck some dark closed door
At the blank end of being and ceased

Against the darkness.—Who can say
If one may die so, rent away
From life and after-life, and eased
At once from destiny? How long
He felt not: but he felt again
The irremediable pain
Recall him; and he woke among
Dread repetitions of the plain
And reeking horror: then his sight
Met all things uttering the vast
Relentless record: then, at last,
Beheld her soul remaining white
And whole and beautiful, no blight
Or ruin cleaving on it. Free
Of the torn frame now would she be,
And all acquitted! And the drear
And clanging night subsided near
And far; and holy stillness grew.

There, after all, remained they two
Together: death's mere subtle change
Dividing. And a new voice—strange,
Ineffable in the night,—it seemed
One in a distant star were heard

Singing celestially,—brought word
  Revealing more than he had dreamed
Of love about him: for the speech
  Of her rapt spirit gazing straight
  Into the veilless face of fate
Was heard there; seeming to beseech
Unyielding destinies and strive
  With angels. Only, visible there,
In the clear wonder death did give
The face of her unfading soul,
  She seemed an angel, thrice more fair
Than she had seemed a woman.

Yea;
But now, for many a league away,
Where he was wandering by day
  And night, through many a land beyond
  The seas and deserts,—Pharamond
Beheld her in that hour: and, whole
Immeasurable miles between,
Across the dark, her soul had seen
  And trembled at him. Strong and loud
And dreadful were his feet that trod
  Thundering on mountain or on cloud—

Traversing earth and sea and air—
With vehement will defying God
To take her; for the golden hair
  Gleamed like a flaunted robe of flame
  Through earth and hell and heaven. He came
With no help of the wind or storm,
  Or miracle by sea or land,
Or deathly terror: in the form
  Of one most mighty, with the brand
Of blood upon stained steel he bore
  Till doom, and blood upon his hand,
And burning badge of one who swore
To bear his love for evermore,
  He came on through the night. And hate
  A long way off did emanate
And fly before him, making felt
  The coming of a fiend. And, lo,
Vengeful, a great way off, he dealt
  Defiance with his voice.

I know
  This only: that, as one might go

Against one's death, the Chaitivel
  Went against Pharamond that night
  And met him ; and the two did fight
Out on the moor.
                              And some can tell
How, while they fought and neither fell,
  The fiend did mock the man and said :
How long wilt thou contend with me,
A day, a year, a century?—
  That thou art come to me arrayed
In this frail garb of flesh and blood,
  And with these arms, as man to strive
For some dull perishable good
  With man ; or, thinkest thou to drive
Back to the grave this soul of mine
  That brake the grave asunder ? Yea,
Look on my soul and think if thine
May fight for an eternal thing
  With me eternal ?
                              And they say
  That, wrestling with the fiend, the man
  Replied : O Pharamond, I can ;

And we must go on combating,
My soul and thy soul to the end!

Then Pharamond's red sword did rend
  The swart air; and they saw him smite
The man; and, ere the man was dead,
  Once more a great voice shook the night
  Saying: Come up and let us fight
Unto the end, as thou hast said;
  And, peradventure, thou or I
  May vanquish some day in the sky;
Or after ages have been spent,
Fighting through every element;
  Or in the place where shadows dwell;
  In thy far heaven or my far hell;
Or never; till some final gloom
Shall end all things and God entomb
  Eternity!——

And so they two fight on till doom.

THE LAY OF ELIDUC.

A

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... more,
... so she might,
... sore,
... night after night;
... that she bore
... yea,
... her sight
... a night and day.

... more, maybe,
... and I took a chain
... her to me;
... call her mine again:
... me not; but I and she
... fair limbs and her neck more fair,
... the fair wasted white of love's domain
... fetters on her golden hair.

... joy it is to see her lie
... me once again; beyond release,
... her hand, her body, till she die,
... mine for me to do with as I please!
... after all I find no chain whereby
... her heart to love me as before,
Nor fetter for her lips, to make them cease
... saying still she loveth me no more.



THE LAY OF ELIDUC.

Combien que j'aie demouré
Hors de ma douce contrée
Et maint grant travail enduré
En terre maleurée,
Pour ce n'ai-je pas oublié
Le dous mal qui si m'agrée,
Dont jà n'en quier avoir santé
S'en France ne m'est trouvée!

GUILLAUME DE FERRIÈRES.

HARD is the banishment from thee,
Fair France! And, like a minstrelsy,
The very naming of thy lands
Rouseth the heart, and eke the hands
Of any son indeed of thine,
In any land of the sunshine
Where his feet tarry or are held;
For, but to think of thee, is spelled
With all his joy or all his woe,
As he shall come again, or no,

To die thy rose gardens among,
Thou land of roses and of song!

This Lay is of Sir Eliduc
And all his warfare, and the luck
He had of love; bitter and sweet:
Ladies, it is a thing full meet
For minstrelsy; whereof indeed
Fair singers have well taken heed
In times before; but, first of all,
In many a stead and castle-hall,
In Brittany it was a lay,
And such as all could sing or say.

He was in honour of his king;
And rich, and crowned with every thing,
That, through the hardest years of war
A knight may yearn and battle for,
To be his guerdon and his pride:
Yea, for at length, right far and wide,
He was the most beloved of knights
For valorous deeds, restoring rights
To all oppressed, both mean and fair;

And him all voices did declare
  The very saviour of his land
  And king from the strong growing hand
Of bitter enemies, whose might
Had brought to many an evil plight
  The shrinking borders of the realm,
  —Whom Eliduc did overwhelm
With such a swift and perfect stroke
In all their quarters, that he broke
  Their utter strength, and put in fear
  All other foes that might be near.

And now, for many a great emprise;
And, because, also, he was wise
  As any elder, and his word
  In every council was most heard,
His name was grown the highest name
Of theirs who in the king's hall came;
  And through the whole land he was known
  Next to the king; and, for his own,
He had a palace like the king's,
Royal and served with sumptuous things.

Yet, for the envying of some,
To see how great he was become
In places where they once had part
But now scarce stood with any art,
—For this sad cause, or else for none,
Since man more noble than this one
Was ne'er in any place at all —
Sir Eliduc came to his fall.
Even he saw how, leaguered round
With false tongues and the feigning sound
Of courtiers, who made constant wile
To work him ill with all their smile,
The king's face fell indeed from him,
And the king's smile at last was dim
And his trust fencèd round with doubt:
Then from the king's house he went out,
Saying a proud word to them all,
To wit, they should have need, and call
Some fair way on him, ere again
He should be there in that king's reign.

But, surely, in the court that day,

There was full many a one to say
  That this should never have been so —
  To let that goodliest of them go,
And with so little thank at last
For all his serving in time past;
  Yea, for he held their hearts long while,
  He had so fair and free a smile;
Half soft, yet sharp and grey like steel
His eyes were; and from head to heel
  Shaped fair he was; and, or with sword
  Or gentler wielding of fair word,
Could win his will in everything
Through field or court, with queen or king;
  Yet was there no man certainly
  Knew aught of him but loyalty.
But swift was he to ride that day
Back to his lands and castle grey,
  Vast lands of meadows fair and green,
  Over whose last swell there was seen
The blue sea,— castle grey, with moat,
And walls that many an axe had smote,
  Upon a hill set, strong and high
  With thronging towers against the sky.

There came his people all to seek
His face; but when they heard him speak
  With changed voice, and beheld his brow
  Where heavy thoughts like clouds were now,
—O they were silent; and, made sad,
Spoke not of tithe or harvest glad,
  Nor of their fortunes bad or good;
  But all with downcast look they stood,
Thinking of him their fair good lord,
Whose praise in each man's heart was stored.
  Then he more saddened them with speech,
  Yea, deeply in the heart of each;
For now he bade them, till some while,
Farewell, and spoke of hard exile;
  For wrath was in him, and his pride
  Let him not any more abide
In any realm of that his king
Unthankful; but he chose to bring
  The glory he was wont to bear
  And service of his sword somewhere
To nobler patron over seas,
Where valour of a knight could please

And any fair thing was to do;
Yea, so he bade them all adieu.

And on that very day, at noon,
To his dear wife he came full soon,
These bitter wrongs of his to tell,
And this last heavier thing as well.
He found her fair indeed that day,
Where she was sitting, robed and gay,
In lonesome coloured chamber high
Over the blue sea; there were nigh
Her jewelled lute with golden strings,
And many fair wrought golden things,
And bright quaint tapestries did lie
On floor and wall, of various dye,
Wrought out in painted histories
Of fair women in every guise;
And, while she sat in listless mood
Sweetening that fair solitude,
She read an open book of rhyme,
Or heeded most the gay noontime
Out on the sunny coloured bar
Shedding in showers many a star

Or like bright scales of glittering gold
Wondrous and lovely to behold.
All there was fit to serve her heart
With pastime; while the greater part
Her thoughts were tuned in sad accord,
Mourning for him their distant lord.
And now full red it made her cheek
To hold him there and hear him speak,
And have so soon of his return
All sweet for which her heart could yearn.

Ah, quick return that brought, alas,
A word whose grief was long to pass!
Ah, sweet—the hardest bought of all
Her heart's rare sweet! Soon hearing all
The evil tale of change and fate
—That now she should indeed but wait,
Might be long years, with no fair sight
Of him or coming of delight,
—Her hope all unassured and long,
Uncertain striving mid a throng
Of dismal fears and thought of foes
Innumerable, and distant woes

Already being wrought perhaps,
—Forefeeling through the doubtful lapse
The bitterness of many days,—
She fell a-swooned; and, in all ways
Of sorrow, passed from thought to thought,
Despairing of all good; nor sought
Too much to turn him from the will
To do that bitter thing; for still
She knew he loved her, and not vain
Could be his deed, while he had pain
As much as hers at heart for it.

So all that eve they twain did sit
Together, losing not a space;
Each gazing on the other's face,
To fill each other's heart right well
With treasure of its love, a spell
Against long parting and all crime
Of falseness through the bitter time.
Full many a vow she had of him
That evening in the twilight dim,
That, in what lands or with what men
His fate were, all his joy, as then,

Should be in holding her most fair
And thought of soon returning there.

Natheless, upon the morrow morn
There was a blowing of the horn
All round about that castle grey;
Not later than the first of day
That came up from the hills behind
All cheerless; while the chill new wind
Fretted between the sea and shore,
And pale lights changing more and more
The dim land and the grey cold sea
Gleamed on fair warriors who should be
Embarked in that day's enterprise;
And all men were not slow to rise
And get them forth to see the start,
Grieving or envying at heart.

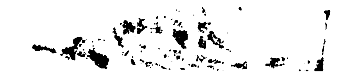
So Eliduc, with warriors ten,
His most beloved, well-chosen men
And tried, his friends in many a fight,
Stood by the ship in the pale light;
And ere the halo from the day

Was fallen, or the misty spray
Gleamed wholly silver in the sun,
Their hardy voyage was begun.

Fair is the south of England's isle:
There the sun maketh a full smile
On broad sweet grass of mountain side,
Or through great woods where birds abide
Full cheerily till summer wanes;
And, in the quaint long pleasant lanes,
—Whose hedgerows gleam with bindweed bells
And fragile particoloured shells—
At warm noontide, quite dries the dews
From narrow footways lovers use
A-wandering hand in hand till eve;
And there indeed the folk believe
In holy Christ and Mary sweet,
Yea, and are fairly wont to meet
In gentle tournay; not unlearned
Of chivalry; but some have earned
In all of Christendom good name,

Whereof indeed the greatest fame
Had Arthur and that Launcelot
Of whom is song that ceaseth not.
But, all before and after these,
The folk hath had but little ease
From evils dire and manifold ;
For in the forests dark and old
Was ever many a lurking harm
Of foe unseen ; and a strong arm
Of weird enchantment too hath been
Stretched over that land fair and green.

Now, longwhile, in a goodly town
Reigned hereabout, with all renown,
A king both wise and valorous,
And happy too in all his house ;
For in his time, full many a year,
The land had peace from every fear,
And was quite easeful now become
With heaped-up wealth in every home.
Bright was the palace that he built,
With carven walls and work of gilt,
In every part wrought at command



By many a Southern craftsman's hand;
And treasure he had now well stored
In many a hidden guarded hoard;
Noble he was and served with love
Of all that folk he reigned above,
Honouring all things fair and free
And caring well for chivalry.

Yet after some long while that thus
All men were living prosperous
In happy peace at home, and fain
To think not else should be again
Their lot, yea to forget well-nigh
The old hard Past and dream to die
Even beneath that sunny fate
Of joy; and so were grown elate
With pride indeed of all;—I say,
After somewhile it was this way,
There happened many a sudden strange
And fearful omen of sad change
And terror coming surely soon.

But lo, the Princess Guilliadun

—Fair I shall show her as I may,
Of whom indeed is all this Lay—
Before the eyes of men she stood
Filling her year of maidenhood;
And now, for all her wealth, and e'en
For her fair beauty that was seen,
Her hand was sought of many a king,
Who came with goodly offering
To that rich court her father had,
And thought to be made rich and glad
With love of her and greater far
Than any other, helped in war
With mighty aid of him her sire.
And with the rest there did aspire
A certain king, no way the least;
Who, past the forests, to the east
Had realms and cities counted fair;
But rude he was, and took no care
Of much that well beseems a knight
In bearing him; nor to the sight
Seemed other than some rugged lord
And leader of outlandish horde.

When he with little grace was heard
Among the suitors, nor preferred
  In any way by the king's hand
  Above the lowest who for land
Paid tribute,—wroth, he left the court,
Leave-taking after no smooth sort,
  But threatening vengeance quick and great;
  And now he sought his wrath to sate.
And it befell that, in no fair
And knightly order of warfare,
  But, in his way barbarian,
  —Lurking in wait with many a man
And marking well the fitting while
When was no dream of foe nor guile,—
  He came upon that town and wrought
  No little panic while men sought,
Bewildered in the strange turmoil
Their arms; and, with much precious spoil,
  He 'scaped them, ere their hands were strong
  To do great battle with that throng
Of ravagers made greatly bold
For sake of many a prize of gold.

Alas, there was an evil sight
At morn in all that city bright,
And every head with grief was bowed;
For many a dwelling-house or proud
Fair treasury, or holy place
Was now made poor of store and grace;
And the great crowd of spoiling feet
Had trodden through the gardens sweet
And made a wreck for all that year;
And little was there held most dear
Of king or townsmen that was found
Unruined all the city round.
So but beginning was their woe;
For now was strengthened every foe
At hearing only what was done;
And with them fought full many a one
Of those contending kings at length,
Ending their strife for common strength
To make their single vengeance sure:
And long the warfare did endure
With various fate on either hand;
But so their foes grew in the land,

Pressing upon them more and more,
That, in a year, they scarcely bore
Against them any equal part;
And were become quite faint of heart,
Because they saw at length small chance
Or hope of new deliverance.

So, while the thing was in such state,
—Ordered of God's own will and fate,
There came to help those failing men
Sir Eliduc with his knights ten.
When he was come into that land,
And learnt what king there had command,
And, verily, what evil plight
They now were in, he deemed it right
To bear him to the palace straight;
And there, before the guarded gate,
Full hardily to stand and crave
To enter in with his knights brave.
And when the king of his intent
Knew perfectly, right glad he sent
A chamberlain to show them grace
And bring them all before his face.

Then, surely, he beheld how fair
And goodly knights those strangers were,
  And most what person of high mien
  Was Eliduc; and, having seen,
He joyed at heart such guests to know
And prayed them now no further go
  In quest of knightly toils, but stay
  And be right welcome many a day,
And help him if they would at need;
Therewith he bade his folk take heed
  Those strangers should be nobly served
  According as their rank deserved,
And in a mansion of the town
Be straight regaled with all his own.
  Right royally with wine and meat
  He made them fare, and all things sweet
Was fain unto them to have done:
But Eliduc spake everyone
  His knights, and gave them this command;
  That they should take nought of his hand,
But use their own in every way;
And this until the fortieth day.

And now, when through the leaguered place
The fame of these was spread apace,
  And their fair vows of timely aid,
  A new and warlike heart was made
In breast of every warrior there,
And strength again to go and dare
  The legion of oppressors rude;
  And, day by day, more grew the mood,
As through the street was fairly seen
The comely and undaunted mien
  Of those fair foreign knights, all clad
  In ready arms, yet wholly glad
And fain of laugh and merriment,
The while an idle time they spent,
  As though there were no foes indeed
  Or war at hand: scarce in more heed
Seemed he—the leader of the band—
Who with a free and careless hand
  Kept feast-time there right bounteously.
  No longer did men think to die,
But felt again all goodly pride;
And every day were fain to ride
  Hotly against the lurking place

Of that ignoble banded race
Of praiseless fighters with the sling
And treacherous shaft, whom none could bring
To open battle in the field;
But now would Eliduc not yield
His word for battle or foray,
Until, upon a wished-for day,
Was told him how along the plain
The foe was seen to rise again,
Coming up in a phalanx dim
From the low dusky forest rim.
Then he caused blast of horn and shout
To clamour all the town about;
And the roused warriors, strong and bright
In ready mail, came to his sight
From every dwelling in the town;
With a great clangour they came down,
More knights than men knew in that realm
To wield bright lance or wear hard helm,
For so almighty was the sound
Of those who stood on high and wound
The brazen brilliant clarion there,
No youth or old man could forbear.

But when he turned and led them all
To battle past the city wall,
  I ween already far away
  The foe was struck with their array,
Where sunshine on the gleaming gold
And glittering silver fell and rolled
  In a proud wave that far and near
  Broke on some plumèd head or spear
Wrought of the hard and threatening steel:
So eager was each man to deal
  His vengeance on those robber bands,
  The spoilers of his wealth and lands,
That all with spur and eager rein
Set forward to the midmost plain;
  And there they met them, and soon paired
  With lance against round shield, and cared
Not much, in all their perfect mail,
For stone or javelin or fierce hail
  Of fluttering arrows; but right close
  They smote among them there with blows
Of mighty battle-axe and sword;
And, while the war grew up and roared

Around them, each one did rejoice
To hear the great undaunted voice
Of Eliduc, and knew no fear;
And not long could the spoilers bear
Such rage as theirs; but, while they fell
Slain more than any song can tell,
With backward steps along the plain
They strove a safer place to gain
Among the trees, where, so pursued,
The hoof-delaying underwood
Might aid and give them yet a hope.
But still, that some might be to cope
Against them in the place they sought
And bring them utterly to nought,
Sir Eliduc gave quick command,
And straightway chose him out a band
Of swordsmen lithe of limb and keen
To follow, without horse, between
The close and thronging trunks a space;
Till they should wholly turn their face,
And be past hope or power more.
O, on that day he smote them sore;
And left them dying far away

Out in the forest! And when gray
  Of evening fell, he turned him round;
  And with much spoil and prisoners bound
Led back that troop of his elate,
And came before the city's gate.
  So with a golden victory
  He saved the king and set him free.

Now is it time indeed and right
  To tell of Guilliadun the fair.
  Sweet was her head with woven hair,
A tender colour to behold
Between the beauty of fair gold
  And some soft palour of fair brown;
  Lovely she was past all renown;
Her face was of no tint one knows,
Save only that of the Primrose,
  With all its strange rare seeming too
  That charmeth so in the spring new
After long waiting. Now, in truth,
All in a tender year of youth,
  She moved in her scarce maidenhood—

Like any Lady to be wooed
In bower and served of lord or knight:
Upon her neck and her arms white
Was many an ornament vermeil
Or filigree of gold-work frail;
And in rich vestures of a queen
All amply broidered she was seen;
Yea, in a robe of silk most fine
Inwrought with many a gem to shine
On train, or in fair shapely sleeve
Of fabrics such as women weave.

So was she; and scarce knew her state,
And fair things done to her of fate;
The while, about her form and face,
Gracious beginnings of all grace
Wrought their most subtly fashioned spell;
And within her was seen to dwell
Some spirit of bright thoughts and new,
Swift glancing out of deep eyes blue.
Her beauty was as sweet a thing
As is the primrose in the spring.

She wondered whether she should die
And ne'er find out the mystery
  Of Love; but daily more and more
  She sought out all his gentle lore;
And, like a maiden pure and bright,
She wooed him, many a day and night,
  With her chaste worship all apart,
  And many an offering in her heart
Of happy blushing thoughts made mute,
And with the music of her lute.

She had a sweet bright-coloured bower
Hidden with many a leaf and flower;
  Wrought all beneath the gay sunshine
  With leaf and flower of eglantine,
And branches green upon the side.
There was her heart set open wide,
  To heed the marvels of sweet sound
  Of the trees singing all around,
Moving like many a shapen hand
Their leaves,—all shining as some band
  Of goodly armoured men of war

What time the sun his light doth pour
On their clashed coats of glittering steel;
And she would hear each sound reveal
Some omen spoken to her heart,
And, in each sight familiar, start
At some new sense or strangeness caught
Making an answer to her thought.

And there, between the leaves and leaves,
In yellow summer noons and eves,
When thousand sorceries of sweet
In strange enchantment seemed to meet,
She took fair sprays of flowers and wove
Her many a destiny of love;
And prayed love would bless this and this,
Seeking yet more some further bliss;
Or after all, forgetting these,
Would dream of fair loves over seas,
Thinking of Tristan and Ysolde
And many another story told,
And almost hear the rich lute strain
From many a royal tented plain
Or golden barge on waters blue:

So she would tempt indeed and woo
Love's self, and much her thought would err
Dreaming what he should do with her.

God, in all things that He hath made,
Full many a jewel hath inlaid;
For first He hath set all on high
That fair enamel of the sky,
Brilliant of blue and eke of white;
Then He hath shed the pearl of light,
And made that jewel-work the seas:
Nor less a gem indeed than these
I count His miracle the Rose,
To love more precious than all those:
But now—a fairer jewel yet—
In every woman He hath set
Her heart, some sort of precious stone;
He shall know perfectly alone
—Who all the stars of heaven can call—
The worth and number of them all.
Most are they given away, or sold
For so much love or so much gold,
Yea, no man knoweth of their cost;

But well I ween that some are lost,
And some are of small worth I say,
And some are broken and cast away.

It is the fairest thing you can,
Ladies, to give this to a man
—This precious jewel that God gave:
One such is all a man may crave.

Now when the Princess Guilliadun
Had heard what things were done; and soon,
How gracious was that foreign knight
And wonderful in all men's sight,—
She was but fain some way to seek
His presence, so to hear him speak,
And win some tale from him perchance
Of foreign wonder and of France:
So with all salutation meet
And many a goodly word and sweet,
On the first morrow of that day
She sent her Chamberlain to pray
Sir Eliduc, of courtesy
That to her presence he would hie

When so he might, and gain her meed
Of praise for all his noble deed.

And, soon as she at length beheld
That chivalrous man of court and field,
Fair, with fair locks unhelmed, and face
Changed from all sternness to all grace,
Yea, found what smiles in him were stored,
Knowing him such a perfect lord
In foreign courts of kings,—alas
She thought some dream were come to pass
Of Love's own sending : with his kiss
He touched her hand ; nor less than this
Fair salutation did he make
With many a sweet word for her sake ;
Then even to her side he came,
And told her many a thing of fame,
Sitting anigh her on a couch.

But, while he heeded not her touch,
Nor what fair hanging of her sleeve
Or robe upon his own might cleave—
O she was feeling in her breast

A spell she knew not, breaking rest
And thoughts too sweet for shame or fear
Making a strange new trouble there,
Shaking her breath with many a start;
And very colours of her heart
Did ofttime rise upon her cheek,
Until she scarce knew what to speak;
And now the more on him she gazed
The more within that sight she praised,
And knew that she could love him quite;
Yea, sooth, if any were her knight,
Sir Eliduc—it might be he.

Thereat so weak at heart fell she,
Troubled a way she could not hide
With him there sitting at her side,
It surely had not failed at last
But on his breast she there had cast
Her head quite weeping.—O, what lack
Of wiles to hide the sore heart-rack
Beginning all love's secret woe,
Yea, of such wiles as women know,
—What lack I say was here!—to sigh

And let the thoughts come up so high
  Out of the heart; yea, as it would,
  To let the heart beat unwithstood
And do its pleasure with the cheek!
Love was so strong and she so weak.

But not like one unskilled I ween
Was Eliduc, when he had seen
  The trouble of her breast and eye,
  And her breath striving with its sigh;
Nay, surely, for he was well taught,
Oft having seen how love had wrought
  With many a queen and lady fair;
  So of his tokens had good care:
That day he left her with a bland
And sweet leave-taking of her hand.

Now all the toil of war was done;
And joy it was to everyone
  To rest that morn in garden sweet,
  Or wander through the idle street;
Or, as though foe had never been,
To seek fair wood and meadow green

And feel the sun's rich hour of glow;
That day, as in time long ago,
Came round the yellow smile of noon
Bringing the easeful shadows soon.

And now this knight, whom all men blest
—In fair pavilion full of rest,
Made sweet with many a perfumed thing—
He lay, half glad, half sorrowing.
Amid the silken curtains there
Tarried the soft-lipped summer air,
With many a murmurous tiding brought
From woodlands far of sweet things wrought
Under the cool leaves all that day,
Or from the blue sea far away.
Yea, he was glad indeed awhile,
All through the sorrow of exile;
For now, no thought of war at hand,
Full of new pleasure seemed that land;
Like soft enchantments in a dream
Under fair floating blue did seem
The summer colours, where, in woods
Of quaint-cut golden leaves, sweet broods

Of pied birds and the painted jay
Flouted with clamours strange and gay;
Or where, in wilds of forest grass,
Through sun and shade was wont to pass
The shrinking spirit-slender herd
Of roes; and, far as his sight erred,
The straitened particoloured mead
Was like some fair mosaic indeed:

And there, for many an hour of rest,
His heart of all things counted best
The thought of goodly Guilliadun;
And—through such soft times of the noon
When most is pleasant need to steep
The sense in dreamy wines or sleep—
Remembered all her beauty fair,
And fragrance of her presence, rare
And haunting as some flower's is;—
The blue of pale anemones
Her eyes were; and her bosom's white,
With every changing hue and sight
That love or shame could make of it;
And with what grace it did befit

Her hands,—their toying with the lace
On her rich vest's embroidered place.

Then on warm mountain side was seen
Full many a broadcast shadow green,
And, from the homesteads deep among
The thronging trees, some strain was sung
Such as the shepherds make at eve;
And soon the unseen hands, that weave
The sweet spell of the summer night,
Were changing softly each fair sight
In all the pleasant world; and soon
The long pale fingers of the moon
Touching all weary things with sleep
Through flower-land and forest deep.

How many a magic Love doth quite
Perform in one short summer night—
Wherein is scarcely space for dreams,
While, on each side the world, it seems
The days nigh join with amber hands,
Over the dimly gleaming lands,
Where under thin-veiled shifting sky

Gleams many a flower with white eye
Unclosed !—On moonlight paven path
How many a meeting place Love hath—
Where dreams, or yearning thoughts that thrill,
Parted in vain, may find their will,
And come together as they range,
And fall into sweet interchange
Like waves with waves, whereof some sign
Felt at the trembling ripple-line
Of either brimming heart doth bring
A rich unwonted comforting!

Not else I ween, nor without aid
Of love's sweet miracle, now strayed
The restless seeking thoughts that brake
The breast of Guilliadun, for sake
Of things some hand of fate had brought
So near, yet thereof left her nought
But loss and love, and like a sore
Filling the heart up more and more:
And her sighs, full of that fair ill,
Set free, drew near, I think, at will
E'en to the breast of him they sought,

And there a sweet contagion wrought:
Else, in some way no man can tell,
Love did renew with greater spell
All heart-enthralling memories
Of Guilliadun and her fair eyes;
And cherished still the slender strain
Of her last words; and wrought again,
From all the balmy pores of night,
The very perfume and delight
It was to be at her fair side;
For over him a charm did glide:
And through the fair hours came a dream
Of her beside him; she did seem
Still hearkening, with her hands at fret,
As in the same fair trouble yet;
The while almost upon his own
The tremor of her arm seemed known,
And in her breath a short half sigh
Hung fluttering; and his heart felt nigh
To some rich living flower—stood still
For fear of breaking some rich thrill.
Then, it seemed, all their words had been
Of nothing else than love; and e'en

Their trouble, that they could not say
How sweet it was, and in what way
It wrought with each of them at heart;—
For, now, it seemed, he, for his part,
Loved most because of the sweet hue
Her eyes held, purer than all blue;
And now for ways her neck was curved;
Or for some secret sweet reserved
In her curled smiles; but now, in truth,
'Twas only for her body's youth,
And the whole strangeness of the grace
Belonging to its every place.
So, a long time, athwart his trance,
Such thoughts love's power did all enhance.

Yet afterward came with a tear
The memory of his own wife dear,
And of her love through all time past,
And of her words and grief at last:
Yea, now he thought, and with it wept,
Of the church where his fathers slept
In the midst of the grey sea town,
In the land where they had renown,

And he was honoured with them all,
When, under shield armorial,
He stood, on holy day and seemed
Before his folk all things they dreamed
Noblest and highest to attain.

Alas, his heart had been nigh fain
To fall away from all that state;
And, for some fair uncertain fate
In alien land, to bear no more,
Laid up in many a precious store,
The thoughts of what had quite made fair
All fates of many a former year,
The long rich pasts of love and fame;
—So at length, till his very name
Should weary on the lips of men,
And in his home among his kin
Should come to be no more a boast,
And he to seem as one quite lost
Or one quite false. Thereof he thought
Full bitterly, till he was wrought
To utter grief; and in his breast
His erring heart at length confest

The treason love had there begun;
And how it had well nigh undone
His constancy; and did intend
Surely no honourable end,
But to bring on him shameful stain
In sight of all men who were fain
To call him noble,—yea, to cast
Him wholly from their praise at last,
As one scarce true with heart and hand
To king and love and fatherland.

But soon, for all such shame, he found
That love had made indeed a wound
Already inmost in his heart;
And that it was quite hard to part
At once from the so sweetened sting,
Whereto the aching thoughts would cling
Right fondly, spite of all his strength:
Then thought he with himself at length,
That neither had he needs take heed
—Like a mere youth unskilled indeed,
To fly a straight inglorious flight
Because of such first simple sight

Of love—that snarer of man's heart,
Nor yet should he forget with art
  To be full armed, so in the end
  To foil the harm love did intend.
For surely, with no spell or snare
Should he be taken unaware,
  Who had well known all subtle ways
  Wherein that enemy most lays
His ambush, yea, and of long time
Seen many an one fall in fair crime
  Of love, trapped most unwittingly;
  —Himself in Love's court held to be
A very courtier above all:
—Yea, little need he fear to fall
  Through aught of love's familiar guile!

  Verily, too, love hath some wile
Laid deeply in the sweet sunshine
And woven in the tissue fine
  Of the mere light and floating air;
  And in the purest place his snare
Is surely set—in field or home
Or wheresoe'er a man may roam

About the world, in day or night,
In moods of sadness or delight,
In crowds or solitudes sought out
Or dreams;—so must He go quite out
Of all the pleasant world, and joy
No more in living, or destroy
The very heart,—whoso would flee
Where no more taint of love shall be.

Moreover, in his exile sad,
I ween, some kind of sweet he had,
Dwelling in any thought or dream
Of love; and so alone did seem
Softened at all his utmost fate
In that far foreign land; for great
Indeed Love's power is to charm,
And he can stretch a magic arm
Over all sadness to prevail.

Then, after all, it doth not fail
—Yea, Ladies, as ye know, I say,—
But there be many a sweet half way,
Wherein is pleasantness enough,

That one may quite come nigh to love,
And e'en accomplish some fair part
Of longing, and regale the heart
Ofttimes with many a tender bliss,
Or feast of passionate looks or kiss;
Yea, many a rapturous thing begin
Whereto shall cleave no word of sin.

Now Guilliadun was grown quite weak
Against her love; and ways did seek
To break the spells of silence set
Hard over all her thoughts; while yet
She sought how, without shame or sin,
She might most favourably win
To some new solace-giving sight
Of fair Sir Eliduc her knight.
She took the fairest ring she had,
And scarf embroidered from Bagdad,
—Of silk it was, rich to behold,
Crimson and wrought upon with gold;
These gifts,—that therewith she might send
Some message written with her hand
To pray him be her knight indeed,

And come and learn some present need
She had of succour: so she fained,
And tenderly her will explained
In words most delicate and meet
To win all things they did entreat.

Then one day,—while, each day's long round,
Full of a fond expectancy,
Yet heavy at her heart, and nigh
Foreboding sore was Guilliadun,—
Failing not still to importune
Each barren hour that brought not peace—
He came; and made at once to cease
The bitter pulse of fear and doubt
That racked her heart; for there, about
His waist, was girded that sweet thing
The scarf her gift, and the fair ring
She saw upon his finger set:
O, her heart joyed, and did beget
A pleasant trust in all its fate.

That day the company was great
About the King, in good array;

For many a noble kind of play
The guests were met; but when the name
Of Eliduc among them came,
The King went to him in mid-hall
And gave him welcome before all.
Anon, he took him, with all grace,
And brought him straightway to the place
Where stood the Princess Guilliadun;
And bade that soon might be begun
Her favour to so great a knight,
As she would show forth her delight
In nobleness and valorous deeds.

—O, as some music strain that leads
The enthralled sense, on willing feet,
Through new discoveries of sweet,
And leaves it dreaming in some heaven
Of half found rapture,—O, as even
All simple solace-giving things,
Proved now that sweet word of the King's,
Heard in the heart of each of these,
Wherein it healed one same disease
Of restless yearning: and, long pent

In many a secret languishment,
Some inmost thought of Guilliadun
—She could not stay it now—too soon
It rose up like a flood with rush
Out of her heart, and sent its blush
Of rapture to the fairest place
Upon her bosom and her face.

Into a chamber now they came,
Apart, where no one was to shame
The fair fruition that they took
At once in many a mingling look.
Ah, to their hearts that place seemed sweet,
A fitting place wherein to meet
One's love indeed. Rich to the eyes
It showed, with couch and tapestries
Wrought all of precious stuffs and new
From conquered East,—rich with a hue
Of changeful purples; and therein
Gleamed many an ornament of thin
And precious filigree of gold,
And marble things fair to behold
Through the dim shadows of noontide:

There, too, the casement, open wide
To many a pleasant singing breeze
And moving shadow of fair trees,
Let in the balmy breath all day,
From many a lovely garden way.—
Ay, fair that chamber was, and sweet
For lovers such as they to meet.

Long time love kept their hearts too faint
For words; and all a sweet restraint
They suffered, daring scarce to dream
The joy they had, that still did seem
Too fair for trusting: then they broke
That precious spell, and words they spoke,—
Such gentle words as knight or dame
May alway, without sin or shame.
And, first, Sir Eliduc would please
That lady's fancy, at her ease,
With all the wonders of the war;
And tales of fair deeds done afar
In harsh fight with her father's foes,
Who so long time oppressed with woes
And bitter dread that pleasant land;

He told her how the heathen band
Cried out at sight of the fair line
Of pointed spears; and how, in fine,
They turned and fled, and were most left
A-dying on the field bereft
Of all their arms and spoil, or died
Fleeing about the forests wide;
And how not such a foe, he thought,
Should now for many a year be brought
From any land of theirs again.
Then too, to tell her he was fain
Some foreign history of kings
And knights, whereof the minstrel sings
Already many a fair romance:
And much he said indeed of France
And of its royal court, with fame
Of many a noble and bright dame.

Meanwhile not less seemed very dear
To him that time while she was near;
Yea, and amid such fair discourse
The depth of many a troublous source
Of feeling came well nigh to break

Its false restraint, yearning to slake
  In many a warmer spoken word
  Its passion; and each time he heard
Her breath in many a liquid sigh,
Scarce fain he was to let it die
  Unculled upon her lips; nor less
  Was touched indeed to sweet distress
His heart, with heeding many a staid
And gentle wooing her eyes made
  Right piteously amid their fear;
  Yea, bitter seemed it to forbear
From satisfying the least part
Of the great longing of the heart,
  With any exquisite delight
  Of touch, wrought on the flower white
Of hand or shoulder, where the sin
Of sight made well nigh to begin
  Some rosy shame: yea, bitter seemed
  To let the moments, unredeemed
With aught of love's sufficing gain,
Fall from the precious present, vain—
  To pass and dwindle fruitlessly
  Into a vanishing memory,

As of frail dreams, dissolving deep
And far away in clouds of sleep.

But when again some space was wrought
Heavy through silence, with the thought
  Of each, that added burdens more
  To every throbbing of the sore
And anguished heart,—he did renew
Fair chosen speech in praise most due
  For the rich gifts her hand had sent;
  And, more, for the full favour meant
In every gracious word she wrote;
And, thanking her, his heart he smote
  And said that he was ready now
  —Yea said and sealed it with a vow—
Both with his hand and all he was
To serve her straight in any cause,
  Unto the utmost of all right,
  As he was now indeed her knight.

O rich the moments were with joy,
Such as no future could destroy——
  Strange, wrought through many an inward throe

And miracle of feeling. Lo
It was the noon; and you might hear
Now, from the open casement near,
Faint sounds that came through sun and shade;
And the mysterious rapture made
Among the leaves and flowers and things
Each rapid summer moment brings
Richly to life. But, on that day,
The garden flowers from far away,—
Yea, even from her own bower apart,
Where so long wearily the heart
Of Guilliadun was wont to dwell,--
They seemed to have a subtler spell
Inwoven with their wafted gift
Of sweetness; and she could not lift
Some urging hand, that seemed to press
Upon her heart and with sore stress
Compel it to some passionate thing
Through many a fearful shuddering:
And love's great magic seemed to meet
With silence of that time, and sweet,
And many a long remembered vow
That urged its true fulfilment now

Out of the lonely maiden past
Of waiting: yea some league at last
Was surely made against her there;
And hard it was for her to bear.

—And, that she could no more withstand,
Full well her fluttering lily hand
Betrayed; and, troubled with its sighs,
Her breast beneath its broideries;
And even her tender foot was seen
To tremble, scarcely hid between
The silken folds wherein it dwelt.

In all her soul a fear she felt;
For she thought, on that summer day,
Sure Love was either come to slay
Her heart that moment, or must do
Some miracle to save her through
At once, what way He only can.

And then, indeed, her lips began
All in a passionate way, and spake
Quite blindly, as the heart did break

Straight into many a beautiful word
Of love; the which, when she had heard,
  Seemed fearful with some direst sin
  That leaves a rankling stain within
And dread for ever.
                    Other far,
And but the sweetest words that are,
  They seemed to Eliduc I think;
  And scarcely fain was he to shrink
From one of them: but when, aghast,
She ceased,—softly he took at last
  Her hand, that, like a bird quite faint
  With fluttering, failed of all restraint,
And lay in his, so white and fair
That his lips did not long forbear
  From kissing out their love on it:
  Nor after did they quite omit
Their pleasant lore of eloquence;
Nor did the heart in any sense
  Fail to suffice their utmost need.
  For, in that place, beset, indeed,
With every sweet conspiring spell,
His heart withstood no more; but fell,

Past saving, into such deep snare
And passionate sin of love, that bare
Of joy seemed any former place
Of rapturous vows, and dim the face
That any earlier lover bore;
And with his lips he quite forswore
—Yea, now, with praise of that hour's bliss,
All former spoken rhapsodies.

Of all the things a man may have
Before he cometh to the grave—
Of all the joys that he may win
Through any toil or any sin,
This is the richest: to possess
One yearned-for hour in loneliness
Beside one's love, in some fair clime,
In some fair purple Autumn time;
For quite shall be forgotten then
The pains and labours among men,
The bitter things of thought and fear;
The bitter ends of hope; and, near,
Quite at one's side, yea, on one's heart,
Yea, touching, with no more to part

The yearning hands or looks that meet,
Shall seem the often dreamed-of sweet
Much more than all the glowing things
To which the fondest memory clings —
Much more than any rapturous past
Or future in fair heaven at last.
And this — the fairest moment, sure,
In each man's life — it shall endure
Some noon ; while creeping twilight dims
Slowly some flower's purple rims,
Or some green distance suffers change
Fading before us : then this strange
And precious rapture — it shall pass,
And never come again, alas !
Nay, for there shall be bliss and bliss,
And love and love, and kiss and kiss,
And many a pleasant touch of hands,
And place for love in many lands,
And communings of heart with heart,
Much to be gained much to impart,—
All these ; but, surely, never more
Doth any time at all restore
That faded purple of delight,

And the same sweet and the same sight
  As when one's love in that fair place
  Blushed with strange crimson, face to face
With every inward passionate thought
Into real living blisses wrought,
  And the heart, through some mystery,
  Seemed filling earths and heavens to be
— Yea, things and spaces dimly known —
With endless feelings of its own.

Hereafter, surely I may say,
That, many an hour in night or day,
  Those lovers knew some precious part
  Of all the joy that heart with heart
Can so beget. Often they came,
And found that silken place the same
  In purple growing glooms at eve ;
  And sat while pleasure would deceive
Their thoughts with many a changing dream
Wrought of each momentary gleam
  Of the unearthly twilight blue,
  That seemed to make the world anew,
Like some enamelled picture fair

With jewelled stars and leaves: now there,
And now in wanderings amid
The pleasant flower-paths, half hid
Beneath safe shadows of the trees,
They dreamed some dream enough to please
All silently; or, one by one,
In their own soft and murmurous tone,
Spoke all the spells that love hath set
In wild sweet words, that ever fret
The lips of lovers, till his gold
And honied secret be all told.

So, of his exile, day by day,
This joy took many an hour away:
It seemed to Eliduc, perchance,
Like some fair love in some romance,
Passed wholly in strange foreign land
And beneath some presiding hand
Of magic.—At his heart did lie
The amulets of memory
In unsought places falling dim,
Till the past was nigh lost to him:

And yet, somewhile, amid this sweet,
The voice within him would repeat
  The living vow his heart had made
  To sacred loves, and the words said ;
And the face of his own wife dear
Some days was with him everywhere
  Between the times of that strange love ;
  As though from far away she strove ;
And her face, pleading speechless, bore
Great shadows and forebodings sore ;
  And often, through the silent night,
  She seemed to come with the moonlight ;
And, with one known look, holding him
In fair arms to her bosom dim
  Through many a tear-stained broidery,
  Mutely some importunity
She seemed all earnestly to keep
—Yea through the hours of his sad sleep,
  And quite until the strange wide morn
  Was opened yellow and the horn
Of foreign huntsmen filled the land.

Sometimes he could not well withstand
 The yearning fairly to behold
 Her face and know what it foretold
Of dim calamity; or still
Within him grew some weaker will
 To visit now and see how fared
 His lands, and whether any cared
For what was his, and if perchance,
Saved from the evil governance
 Of plotters vile, the king were turned
 Again to him so wrongly spurned.

Meanwhile it had but come to pass,
His king,—sore grieved, finding, alas,
 How, with deep traitorous intent,
 Those false reviling ones had bent
His mind to a wrath all unjust
Against one worthiest of all trust;
 And further, for that he was pressed
 Right hotly now in lands possessed
Upon a border, by hard foes;—
He sent an embassy of those

His noblest, who the most were dear
To Eliduc; and bade them bear
A royal word of full regret
Praying him wholly to forget
His wrong and exile, and to bring
His unmatched sword back to his king.

But lo, no sooner had he heard
Than he was glad of every word.
Yet was he troubled other way;
And held his heart still day by day
From seeking such a bitter thing
As his free parting from that king
Who had so soothed his hard exile
With perfect favour of his smile:
But, more than all, for the fair sake
Of Guilliadun, and fear to break
The very life within her heart
At the first seeking to depart;
For this, full many a bitter thought
Most deeply in his bosom wrought,
Stirring the love within him straight;
And all the tenderness that late

Had gathered in the inmost core
Of feeling, now it made right sore
The very soul of him within.

—O Ladies, when you will begin
With love, you know scarce on what dark
And eddying stream you do embark
A skiff so frail and rudderless
As this poor heart! nor can you guess
How soon, and in what subtle way,
Love will procure you for his prey,
Quite trapped sometime at unawares
In dire entanglement and snares
Past all your own wit to undo:
Yea, but ye know that this is true:
And now ye see that noble knight
Sir Eliduc, holy and right
Before all men, is come to fall,
And so without his fault at all,
In such a perilous strait indeed,
Of love, between two ways that lead
Each to some equal ill,—I deem
That well before him it must seem

A hard and hopeless thing to live
For any day, now he must strive
In seekings or forsakings sore:
I pray you pity him therefore.—

And when he found that Guilliadun
Fell in her sorrow nigh to swoon
At word of parting from him so,—
And that no joy again could grow
In her sad bosom for the sake
Of other love, but she would take
At once some inward death for him,
To waste her body and quite dim
Her sad remainder of life's space—
When this he saw upon her face,
Knowing her trust and truth in love,
He could not quite forbear; but strove
To soothe her heart with promise fair,
That, surely, no toil would he spare
To win some near day of return,
Whereto he ne'er should cease to yearn.

So Guilliadun beheld him go;

And stayed her sorrow and her woe;
 For she could love him all the while
 Waiting, and think of his last smile;
And trust his tender uttering,
And dream of the fair future thing.

Then in his land he did arrive;
And made the joy of all to thrive
 With sight of him, whom all men knew
 Long time so noble and so true,
And now again their very strength
And saviour; for no foe at length
 Endured before his armèd hand:
 Right soon he beat them from the land.

A year he was in field and court;
And now his honour fell not short
 Of anything a king may give;
 And, save the king, no man did live
So royally in all men's eyes.

But, after all the hard emprise
 And triumph of the war were past,

He did become as one downcast
With some o'er-measured weight of things
Sad in some memory that clings
Speechless about the heart. And slow,
Against his will he seemed to go
To tilt or tournay or fair sport;
So that, for him, in all the court,
Was truly now great heaviness,
And many an one would strive to guess
What thing so ailed him. Then again
He did return—as one most fain
Of solitude—to his own place.

There they were right glad of his face;
And there, maybe, he stayed awhile
In such fair peace as would beguile
The living sadness that he bore,
And thoughts that should not evermore
Be slain or ended; there, maybe,
In his grey castle by the sea,
The pleasant holy pasts renewed
Awhile their hold on him, and sued
About his heart not all in vain;

Or it seemed precious to regain
Each old accustomed thing and mode,
And find for him there still abode
Unchanged the honourable love;
And many a time he sought to move,
With sudden tenderness new felt,
Some little memory that dwelt
Far away in its hidden place
Among the rest; or on the face
Unchanging sweet of his true wife,
Fair with the love of all his life,
He would find still, and prize it best,
Some likeness of the tenderest
And first love-look.
—Alas, I say,
For afterward he fell away
From all this; ah, his bitter fate—
It could but have him soon or late!
And sadness and the utter strength
Of thoughts divided, and, at length,
The whole real passion of strange love,
Foregone awhile, rolled back and drove
His soul to its sweet sin again.

But still he lingered, as though fain
He would deny the thing, and deem
That some mere false and evil dream
Were but defrauding him awhile
With strange delusion ; a sad guile
Taught him to do in every way
His wont; nor ceased he any day
From chace with hounds or falconry;
And yet when there was none to see
He ceased maybe from all, subdued
At once with some most bitter mood
Of thoughts that chimed not with his deed;
And, as though inwardly did bleed
Some sudden wound, he reined up short,
In very middle of the sport,
In any lonely wood or place
Of cover,—heeding not his chace
Nor yelping of his hounds returned
Sadly about him. But he spurned
Long time such weakness and forbore ;
Yet more the weakness grew and more ;
Until he could not bear the day,

So irksome seemed to him his way,
So bitter was this inward strife.
The very sweetness of his wife
And every tender silent look
Became a thing he dared not brook
And harder than the hardest taunt
Against his falseness.—In no haunt
Familiar with the fair times past
And lost, for him now could there last
Repose or peace; but he would flee
Long dreary miles beside the sea
In rough paths of the rocks, and dare
Some solitude no man knew where,
And battle all day with that foe,
His fate of passionate sin and woe.

But, one night, in a ship well manned
With speedy oarsmen, to the land
Of Guilliadun once more he sped.
Darkness and storm were overhead;
And there, apprised some secret way
He took her—glad through her dismay
At any sight of him at last

And end of bitter waiting past.
And through the night upon his breast
Love made indeed her terror rest;
Till on the morrow the pure sun
Seemed mindful of no wild deed done.

And now that all the sky above
Was blue and their hearts full of love;
And all about them fell a sound
Of golden waves like laughs around
Their rapid keel; the while, afar,
To the fair coloured distant bar
Of the bright ocean, gleamed the hue
Of halcyon hours,—ah, now they two
Joyed in great silent overflow
Of loves: for them, the very glow,
And myriad-woven sounds of wind,
And mingling sounds of waves combined
In many a mystery of sweet;
And, in accomplishment complete
Of some ineffable thing dreamed,
With secret inmost soul they seemed
To touch now wholly; and a thrill

Of inward rapture did fulfil
The long desire of every look,
So that their thoughts now scarcely took
The weary and imperfect ways
Of words, as in those fainter days
When they were sadly bound to speak
Their hearts in repetition weak,
Or in an agonised embrace
To kill some doubt or to efface
The constant marring bitterness.
Now, in the mute and pure caress
Of liquid looks and secret thought,
As though at length all love had wrought
Some miracle of peace, they lay,
Voyaging in their bark made gay
With many a coloured pennon bright
And canopy beneath the light
Floating in silken folds; and near,
Time after time, they loved to hear
The silver sound of oars, and oft
The music of the lutes, played soft
About the prow, and like a song
Fallen from some æolian tongue

Of zephyr. All about them came
A strange sweet pleasure above name
Or word or thought: and things around,
In living sight or living sound,
Grew in mysterious sort akin
To every feeling sense within
Their hearts; and many an unseen kiss
Seemed to be covering them with bliss;
For the most trivial noise, that thrilled
From the sail fluttering or filled
With breath from some rich unseen lip,
Or the least murmur of the ship
Came to them changed some way, and fraught
With strange enchantment or strange thought
—Fell into accents at their heart
With tenderness enough to start
Their pleasant tears. And, as they went,
Sometimes a little wonderment
Would move them, or they thought, perchance,
That they were fallen in some trance
Of joy too perfect to endure:
For, now, the world seemed all so pure
Down through the waves or far above

Through heavenly blue, and, for their love,
Breaking in colours fair and oft
Like smiles ineffable and soft
Out on the calm, and all for them,
Breaking in many a flower and stem
Of wonders beautiful with light,
Revealing liquid depths of sight
Under each amber-coloured wave.
—So joyed they. Ladies so I crave,
Yea, so I pray Love keep for me
Some halcyon hour upon the sea
With one most loved,—some hour all brief
Between the sins and all the grief
Of love,—between the day and night
Of bitter life, one hour's delight!

Alas! for they had come perchance
Now even to the land of France;
But ere they touched it, and with feet
Quite saved from all the sea,—the sweet
False wand of their enchantment fell;
And sudden broken was the spell
Which love had laid on all their fate

To blind them: and the treacherous state
And smiles of the dissembling sea
Changed fearfully to many a free
And foamy utterance of wrath.
Sudden before them all their path
Showed horrible with writhing sight
Of restless billows without light
Athwart the feeble ruling tides,
With bounding backs and seething sides,
Urging their wild tumultuous way,
Lolling out forkèd tongues of spray:
Then, with a quick and rushing blast,
The dismal tempest clouds were cast
All ruin-filled across the face
Of heaven, marring each sweet space,
And rending all the false fair blue.
Quickly each sudden peril grew.
And soon the wind and stormy noise
Broke forth above them—a great voice
In torrent menaces of death;
And soon, from greatest depths beneath,
The monstrous multitude of waves
Came up from all the darksome caves

Ploughed over by their goading keel,
And stood around them, harsh as steel,
Brandishing many a fearful point
And whitening crest, above dark glint
Of cloven seas that opened wide
Vast mouths of waters on each side.

And when there was no sort of peace,
But dread did utterly release
The trembling ribald tongues of men
—Thinking that surely they were then
To deal at once with death,—there grew
A fearful thought among that crew
Of fated men, and through the ship
A murmur went from lip to lip.

And, at last, one man from the crowd
Came forth, and bitterly and loud
He cried that hard upon the head
Of each of them was punishèd
The grievous sin of one alone;
And that the wrath of heaven was shown
Now clearly for Sir Eliduc,

And all they had this evil luck
Because that, foully, in despite
Of every law and holy right,
He bore that maiden to the land
Where yet one, wedded with his hand,
Lady and wife, dwelt sweet and good:
And surely none could change the mood
Of heaven; and, till their souls were seen
Quite purged from all such guilt and clean,
This hand of punishment so sore
Would not depart; but the dear shore
Of that their native land would quake
Beneath them and reject to take
Them so polluted anywhere.

So cried he loudly, coming there
To Eliduc, heeding no threat,
And, ere indeed he yielded yet,
One word had wrought its bitter sting
—One word that told an evil thing;
Launched fatal, like some wingèd dart,
It struck unerringly the heart
Of Guilliadun, pale where she lay,

Half fainting in the mere dismay
 At thought of death in midst of bliss;
 The sense thereof she could not miss,
The sense of all the treacherous woe
That fate and love had made her know.
 Then, with a wound, upon her smote
 The pang of all her life remote,
To distant days made full of grief,
And to all days beyond relief,
 Yea, while she yet lived Guilliadun.
 And so at once as in a swoon
Or death she fell. O all in vain
Was any leech to bring again
 The precious throbbings of her heart,
 Or any kiss to melt apart
Her sealèd lips and from beneath
Draw forth the spirit of her breath.
 But Eliduc, half mad was he,
 And would not have that this could be
Her death; and now, in all men's sight,
He strove with the full passionate might
 Of kisses and entreaties hot,
 Wrought breathlessly upon each spot

Where lingered yet the tender hue
Of her scarce life: so burning too
  With rage and vengeance was each word
  He said, no man of them that heard
Durst come before him now for dread,
No man durst say that she was dead.

—But lo, such sudden way appeased
Was all the wrath of heaven, and ceased
  From any troubling of them more;
  And very soon they came to shore.—

Then wholly taken up with grief
—With all the growing thought of grief—
  Sir Eliduc he did not stay
  For help or vengeance on that day;
But himself from the bitter shore
That tender Guilliadun he bore.
  And quickly to a hidden place,
  Hidden and hard for steps to trace,
Athwart the pathless forest dim
He brought her. There all known to him
  A little sanctuary stood

Hallowed in middle of the wood,
A silent place deserted quite;
And there upon the altar white
He placed her, beauteous with closed eyes,
A perfect lover's sacrifice.

It seemed as though the forest made
For that white place a deeper shade;
And there the trees all vast and old
Stood with their secrets manifold
All shrouded up in shadowy thought,
Between broad leaves together brought,
Like vast hands folded in repose.
It was the place some hermit chose
To solemnise with all his tears;
And of his strivings through long years,
And all the penitence he did,
And all the holy life he hid,
—The leaves and flowers, of all these things,
Cherished maybe rememberings,
—Kept tender secrets of the ways
He lived and hallowed all his days,

The tears he shed, the sighs he sighed,
And the sweet spot on which he died.

There was a holy sort of gloom
As though most certainly a tomb
  Were hidden thereabout somewhere,
  With scarce a sign, but very dear
To all the flowers and to God :
And certainly the perfumed sod
  Seemed consecrated all around.

  So Eliduc a place had found,
A place quite sweet and lone enough
To make an end of such a love
  —Not ineffectual at the last,
  But, out of all its short sweet past,
Furnishing some great fund of tears
And memories to enrich long years
  With many a secret rhapsody:
  So the real flower of love should be,
—O flower unearthly, over-rife,
Too frail for any soil of life !—
  Henceforth some immaterial bloom

Of ever-lingering perfume;
So he should keep that precious sin
A thing henceforth all hid within
The heart, not judged of any man:
Let Him judge Eliduc who can!

But, while he had her there alone,
A little season, to atone,
With many an utterance agonised
Of tears and utmost grief unprized,
—Before the bitter silences
Of fates, that hearkened pitiless,
Weighing nought of the words and sighs,
Gazing from cold futurities
Immutable with doomful gaze,
—And more than all before her face
Silent more fearfully indeed,—
Truly she did not fail to plead
Fairly with him for all her wrong;
Yea, piteously indeed and long,
Her whole face, with no smile beneath,
Made seeming sad for aye with death,
Reproached him with an endless look;

The very mouth from which he took
  Its kiss, seemed now, in some clear way
  Its own, to form what it would say,
And in a wordless whispering
Absolve itself from everything
  That left him solace after all:
  Seeming with pressed lips to recall
The spirit from each little kiss
Denying all the past of bliss.
  And this was more than to have heard
  The vengeance of some poisoned word
Or seen one look of sad adieu
And disavowal,—this, to sue
  For ever, with remorseful cares
  And penitential pain and prayers,
Her face, that seemed still to retain
A sad account of every stain
  His sinful passionate touch had wrought,—
  Her face that seemed in holy thought,
Beyond relenting the least while
Into the faintest, purest smile.

In truth he had her fallen there,

As though she were some flower fair,
  Ruined with eager wanton hand,
  So that no man should understand
The mystery of its sweetness—now
Dissolved in the sad overthrow
  Of petals yielding to each breath
  Their passionless unfruitful death:

So a mere bitter fruitless thing
At length, after all suffering
  Of love and long desire and sin,
  It was in such a sort to win
That shadow of possessing her,
That joyless liberty to stir
  The fallen blossom of her face,
  To put her hand in any place,
And weary of each wondrous touch
His heart had coveted so much:

Now indeed there was none to care
What he should do with her sweet hair;
  But he could wind it as of old
  Around her head, or loose its gold

In lavish waste upon her neck;
And all the gems that used to deck
  The fair white place above her breast,
  The jewelries upon her vest,
And starry rings that made her hands
Like flowers on which a fair dew stands,
  Piercing the light with sudden hues,
  —All these were his to touch and use;
Sad playthings now were they, alas,
Pastimes for grief that could not pass.

How false a solace was it, so
To smooth her hair aside, and show,
  Pale as a pearl shed on some flake
  Of snow, her ear; to touch and take
Its ornament of filigree,
And never win therewith to see
  One kindled change in any place
  Of tender feeling on her face!
How sorely earned a right was this
To know the tender mysteries
  Of her apparel, intricate
  In all its fragrant mazes, late

So pure a marvel of sweet guile
Enamouring long his heart; the while
Around him, dwindling less and less
The faint blown fragrance of her dress,
Seemed like some thinnest part of all
Her spirit fading past recall!

O for some long and bitter space,
Weeping beside her in that place,
I ween, not otherwise he sought
To fill his heart, but with sad thought
And fantasy of grief like this,
Feeding the fountainous abyss
Of tears.
—And like some watery blast,
Brought from the whole warm west and cast
Upon the rotting summer woods,
That sweeps with constant rage of floods
Down all the wild and rainy way
The undergrowth of many a day,
And mighty wounded limbs of trees
Torn from them writhing, and, with ease,
The timid multitude of leaves

Falling with every sigh that heaves
The trembling forest; and, at length,
Sated in all its tyrant strength
With ruin of the beauteous year,
Leaves the whole forest still and drear
With tall trees leafless letting through
The skies of winter calm and blue:
—So was that torrent of his tears
From all the heaped-up source of years
And gushing springs of thought within:
It washed away much love and sin,
Yea, from the deep grounds of his heart,
And left him like a man apart,
Henceforth, from all man's fitful fate
Of stormy feelings passionate.

The grey cold sadness of his eyes
Was very like the winter skies;
And now that all the tears were past
He rose; and felt some peace at last,
To think that love had surely done
His worst there, and would even shun
That heart of his for evermore,

Leaving the precious dust it bore
In every tortured place of thought,
Leaving the tarnished treasure brought
Through bitter paths of memory;
And that no future could deny,
Through any new uncertain fate,
These things he held in such sweet state
Of memory — eternal so,
This passionate past of joy and woe.

There, as he found her day by day,
Her beauty did not pass away;
But Death seemed tenderly to touch
Her cheek, quite slow to wither much
Her tender hue; quite fain to spare
The semblance of her spirit fair
In her face fading flowerwise.

And, when, from looking on her eyes
He could not stay sometimes his love,
But in some tremulous way did move
One of the fringed and perfect rims,
There seemed not such a death as dims

Even the innermost frailest hue
Of living; but still, looking through
  Pale glistening waters warm and deep,
  Seemed all her soul there, as in sleep,
Or smiling through some fond deceit,
And seeing truly fair and sweet
  The great blue heaven above her spread,
  And the bright branches overhead,
And all the place indeed and him:
Yea, as though all were some fair whim!

And, often through the long golden noon
When the day's summer seemed to swoon,
  And the rich sunlight far and wide
  Transfigured and so glorified
The forest, passing to and fro
Like a blonde angel; and the glow
  Grew wondrous and the place was thrilled,
  And fervid purple flowers filled
More mightily the place with bloom,
—O then it seemed some blessèd doom
  Of peace was still pronouncèd there;
  Or some past mystery of prayer

Was hallowing the silence yet;
Yea, so that death might there forget,
  Or be in wonder, tarrying long,
  Or come quite changed there from the throng
Of flowers, in some perfumed way,
And with no envy of decay:

O it was good to be there then
With her, and all so far from men!

And sometimes, after he had wept,
With strange and holy feeling crept
  A greater peace into his heart
  Than came of any dream or art
Of thought,—a part of some long calm
Quite after death—a mystic balm
  Of saving shed from some fair vase
  In heaven, in such pure way as awes
Through the full sunshine everywhere:
O it was blessèd to be there!

Or sometimes all the heart fell faint
With inward thinking of the Saint;

And, dying some pure death of trance,
Or purified past all hindrance
Of each participating dross
Of sense, beheld His spirit cross
One of the gleaming ways and melt
Into the light; beheld or felt
And knew Him walking through the place,
And all his presence like a grace
Working that miracle of peace.

—So Eliduc came to great ease
At length in all his soul within,
Like one whom all his mortal sin
God hath forgiven. Who can tell
How great a holiness and spell
Shall be and evermore abide
In the place where a saint hath died!

Then one day, through God's grace above,
—While he was looking on his love,
And thinking how it had been sweet
If before death they two could meet,
And for some little space so live

Without sin, God should quite forgive—
This miracle was wrought for him:
A little ermine swift and slim
And purely white with spirit eyes,
Out of the forest came; and thrice,
In a strange fearful way like light,
It ran across the bosom white,
Yea, and the upturned face as well
Of Guilliadun; and then it fell
Straight to the ground and would have fled;
But as it fell it lay there dead.
And while he wondered much thereat,
Another ermine, white as that,
Came from the wood seeking its mate;
Then, in a way disconsolate,
Finding it stark and with cold eye
Dazzled with death, a sharp sad cry
He gave, and ran back as he came,
And brought a strange bright flower like flame
Or redder than the hue of blood,
Gathered in some place in the wood,
And set this with an unknown care
In the mouth of the other there,

Upon the loosened languid tongue:
And, after this, it was not long
  Before that great and simple charm
  Worked potently against all harm,
And, by its virtue, did renew
In all the body the quick hue
  And litheness of the life again;
  And then those ermines were so fain
Of their fair life sportive and sweet,
That with the swiftness of their feet
  Straightway they fled and entered quick
  The forest mazes cumbered thick
With flowers.
              —Eager at this sight
Was Eliduc, to try what might
  There yet were in that wondrous spell:
  Nor was he doubtful, feeling well
Some holy purpose in the thing,
Above his fond imagining;
  And so he found without delay
  The fallen flower, where it lay
Redder indeed than any flame;
And, praying well in Jesu's name,

He wrought the charm as he had seen.
And as that flower touched between
The deathless lips of Guilliadun,
It broke the mystery of her swoon,
And let her open blithe and wide
Her eyes from which no thought had died,
And gave her mastery of her breast
To wake out of their fit of rest
The fitful happy tides of breath;
All through her body, which no death
Had sullied nor availed to chill
Went many times the blush and thrill
Of pleasant living; and, at length,
Her spirit, summoned by the strength
Of all the charmed and yearning gaze
Of her real love, through many a maze
Of half-sighs faltering, was brought,
From bodiless abodes of thought,
Back to the perfect summer light,
To flush her whole face with delight,
Finding each kiss of love there still.

O what like love can cure the ill

Of love? That moment overthrew
All timorous thinking; and they knew
  Henceforth for ill no sort of name
  But Death; for all the world became
Their own; and trivial seemed all fear,
And light all other things to bear,
  While they could each the other find
  In any place of life, and bind
Their souls together in such wise.

And so, beneath those summer skies,
  Full of their hearts, that did begin
  Most overflowingly within
A fresh fertility of bliss;
—Delayed I think by many a kiss,
  And ofttimes by such fervid tide
  Within their hearts as would abide
No long restraint indeed or loss
Of perfect interchange,—across
  The flowering forest paths they came,
  In all this rapture without name;
And tenderly their steps would cling
To each delicious wandering;

And many a soft delay they found,
Where with new smiles the forest ground
Lured them to press its printless soils
Of yielding mosses; or where coils
Of festal flowers held their feet,
Or rose up fairly to entreat
And half compel them to abide,
Would not be alway thrust aside.

And they — scarce in a haste were they:
Lo, now I leave them on the way.

Alas, for here I have to tell
Of all the sickness that befell
Unto a lady worth all love:
Surely there was none fair above
That lady Eliduc called wife,
None fitter for one's love in life;
And now that she is gone, I say,
Even from all this life away,
And with her love and holiness

Saved from that time of her distress
  For ever,—as it came to pass—
  Who shall be like her now alas?

O in the early day when she
Was left, but first not utterly,
  But with a false fair thought of joy
  And hope, bright seeming, to destroy
The burning canker of despair,—
Her heart made promise to forbear,
  Indeed, from any bitter grief
  Or doubt of fate, and took relief
In golden seeming of the sweet
Fair days that brought the future fleet.

And in that chamber, where she dwelt
Most with the thought of him, she felt
  —O many a tender ecstasy,
  In lonely noontime when the sea
Glowed and made music from afar,
Or in the twilight when the star
  Of Venus sweet came out to rule
  The dreams and fancies beautiful

Of lovers; and if any sight
Or time or thing gave her delight,
  Yea, if the golden time or dim
  She loved, it was because of him.
And when,—amid the changeful round
Of deeds wherein her fancy found
  Some consolation or pastime,
  Through precious toil or chanted rhyme
Of song, that many an hour made full
Of solace,—in delicious lull
  His voice would reach her, and the tide
  Of the soft parting words would glide
Through the calm space of thoughts and sighs
Her heart was,—she would dearly prize
  That moment:

And she had no fear
That he—the only one she loved—
Could be of any other moved
  To real forgetting. Many a way
  She found to keep her heart half gay,
And pleased with every wanton thought
The hope or memory of him brought.
  Then there was ever and again

Upon her lips the happy stain
His kiss had left there like a touch
Of flowers,—a little thing, not much
In telling, but indeed a charm
Quite potent to keep off the harm
Of many a doubt and bitter fret
Of sorrow, yea, to soothe her yet.

But in some little while, despite
Her joyous will and the thoughts bright,
That ever like a little rill
Of tender laughter sought to fill
Serenely all the quiet day,—
But in some little while, I say,
Her inward love failed not to start
Oft in such trouble at her heart,
Suffusing with such purple glow
Her bosom emulous of the snow
For peace and whiteness, that she learned
Almost with trembling how she yearned
To have him back, e'en but to speak
Some mightier word than all words weak
Her tenderness had found before.

Then when, a day long waited for,
She held him in her arms, and gazed
Upon the face her heart so praised,
And saw a strange new shadow there;
And when she felt his voice forbear
From touching many a wonted tone
Whose meaning was best loved and known;
And, wondering, she must confess
Now wholly foiled and powerless
Each tender magic she could make,
That, all about her, used to take
His looks, in many a guiltless snare
Her fond inventing would prepare,
—That day, when such a thing she found,
Her heart took a great bitter wound
Of doubt and poisoned thought within.

Yea, after that, she did begin
—O through the dreary ways untold
Of sorrow, secret, unconsoled—
To fall away from all her place
In that fair heaven of love and grace

Which she had so long held her own,
Whose precious state had even grown
  The very custom of her life;
  Yea, spite of all the hidden strife
Her heart in all its meekness made,
She must behold now change and fade
  Away from her that gilded light
  Of the known love that made so bright
Her life around her; she must miss
That air which seemed to hold a kiss
  Dwelling about her evermore,
  That mute look seeming to adore
Her very presence everywhere.

Maybe, she could not quite despair
  At first, and with some clinging hope,
  Maybe, her fondness sought to cope
Against this hidden woe and strange
That did so desolate and change
  Her husband's all belovèd look:
  For very hard it was to brook
The sight of him, whom all men's eyes
Saw bearing secret miseries

Of thought, and heavy all the day
And weary of his former way,
—For her with whom had ever been
His heart, it was right hard, I ween,
To see this, and, in no hour dim,
Draw more than others nigh to him.
—Ah bitterly she learned the truth
That he could no more turn to her
And leave it to her hand to stir
The sadness from about his thought.

Then she found how for her he wrought
A very sad and cruel guile,
A piteous semblance of a smile,
As though he deemed she should not know
How she was served with feigning now.
Alas, he marked not her sweet ways,
And grieved that charmer of his days!

But when she quite believed, at last,
She was from all sweet love outcast,
A quick disease and mortal sort
Of sorrow took her, to make short

The bitter time she could not bear.

Her golden chamber grew most drear;
  And now, about her so forlorn,
  The sweetest things there seemed to mourn,
And all the spells of pleasantness
Were changed to working her distress;
  Her precious playthings seemed to reach
  For her a plaintive kind of speech,
Holding a language all day long
Together, like a funeral song;
  And from her lute there broke a sigh,
  Or like a sob when none was nigh,
Appalling her, as though she heard
Her own voice uttering some great word
  That broke her life's sharp chord of ill:

  There, more and more, she felt the chill
Of fate's mysterious encroach;
And shuddered now from all approach
  Of the rough outward stir of life;
  Her eyes made tremulous weak strife
With the once fair familiar light

Of day, that now seemed over-bright,
With never any tempered gleam
Fit for the sadness of her dream;
At length, when twilight made that room
Most dim, there seemed no place of gloom
So dim as the dim place she sought
To hide the shadow of her thought.

And Eliduc was far away,
No man knew where or till what day
He tarried, but alas, all vain
For her was now his face again:
Since she was nothing at his side,
What mattered it how soon she died?

For, now that all within her felt
So sure of change, and well nigh dwelt
With death already in her dreams,
To the most tender summer gleams,
The blue skies, and the sunniest sights
Of life—to these her heart held rights
No longer; but, without complaint,
Her dreams would bear her spirit faint

To sunless places, far away
In some wild forest, where the gray
  And ancient leaves, each like a whole
  Dead shrivelled remnant of a soul
Withered and shrunk away at last
From every part of a life past,
  Their nameless sort of burial found,
  In shifting graves upon the ground,
Or frittered the long hours of death
Away with every changeful breath
  That swept them from their shallow tomb.

  So did her soul forefeel some doom
Grey cold and unremembering,
And more and more seemed hovering
  On borders where the dim mists dwell,
  Nigh within feeling of the spell.
And ever weaker grew the thread
That held her from among the dead,
  And could recall her painfully
  To any bleeding memory
Of the defrauded life she left.

Truly, with her, sorrow had reft,
  Quicker than any ailment can,
  The right of that short summer span
Her life from her; and, in quick space,
The conscious fading of her face
  Foreswore its emulous coloured sign:
  Yea, quickly, as the flower most fine
Sudden disheartened may forsake
And shed its purple flake by flake
  In one short day, till with pale head
  It stands disrobed as do the dead.

At length, one day, some seeking her
Entered, and found her not astir;
  And knew death's touches everywhere
  And, at once, all that chamber fair
Deflowered and quite transformed with death;
For gone was the most magic breath,
  And all the eloquent sights were mute:
  Only, as though upon her lute
A hand smote passing, was there still
In all the silence some sad thrill

Of the last sobbing musical
Of broken chords. There, after all,
They felt fulfilled the inward thought
Which daily in their hearts had taught
Such shadowy fear; and, where they now
Beheld her sitting, need—I trow—
Was small for one to touch her hand,
Or e'en her lips, to understand
The truth of the pale change they kept.

Then surely each one of them wept
That Eliduc was still away:
And, now,—alas, for him I say;
For, surely, when he doth return
Sir Eliduc shall have to mourn.

Has summer come without the rose,
  Or left the bird behind?
Is the blue changed above thee,
  O world? or am I blind!
Will you change every flower that grows,
  Or only change this spot—
Where she who said, I love thee,
  Now says I love thee not?

The skies seemed true above thee;
  The rose true on the tree;
The bird seemed true the summer through;
  But all proved false to me:
World, is there one good thing in you—
  Life, love, or death—or what?
Since lips that sang I love thee
  Have said I love thee not?

I think the sun's kiss will scarce fall
  Into one flower's gold cup;
I think the bird will miss me,
  And give the summer up:
O sweet place, desolate in tall
  Wild grass, have you forgot
How her lips loved to kiss me,
  Now that they kiss me not?

Be false or fair above me;
  Come back with any face
Summer; do I care what you do?
  You cannot change one place—
The grass, the leaves, the earth, the dew—
  The grave I make the spot,
Here where she used to love me,
  Here where she loves me not.

THE LAY OF YVENEC.

'Maleit seient tut mi parent,
E li autre communalment,
Ki à cest jalus me donèrent,
E de sun cors me marièrent.
A forte corde trait e tir,
Il ne porra jamès murir.
Quant il deust estre baptiziez,
Si fu al flum d'enfern plungiez.
Dur sunt li nerf, dures les veines,
Qui de vif sanc sunt tutes pleines.
Mut ai sovent oï cunter
Que um suleit jadis trover
Aventures en cest païs
Qui rechatouent les pensis.
Chevaliers truvoent puceles,
A lor talent, gentes e beles;
E dames truvoent amans,
Beaus e curteïs e vaillans:
Si que blamez n'en estoient,
Ne nul fors eus nes veeient:
Si ceo peot estre e ceo fu,
Si onc a nul est avenu,
Deu ki de tut ad poeste,
Il en face ma volenté.'

MARIE: *Lai d'Yvenec.*
MS. Bibl. Harl. No. 978.

THE LAY OF YVENEC.

SINCE I have e'en begun to sing
Full many a tender and sweet thing
  Of love and lovers; half to ease
My heart's great woe of yearning thought,
That many a love indeed hath brought
  Against me, yea, that shall not cease
  This side of death; and half to please
Your gentle ears, if so I may;
Shall I end adding lay to lay,
  Having yet in my heart unsung,
  Strangest and loveliest among
The treasured tales that Marie sang
This tale of the fair love that sprang
  Wondrous, and like a flower unsown
  In the sad desert of a lone

And hopeless life? Ah, miracle!
—That visitest so secretly
The straight, the joyless inward cell
Of many a soul that hath to dwell
Chained to some unknown misery
Of thought and unattainable dream
Of heavens: unearthly do they seem
Unreal and distant as a star
Until thou, soft and sudden—light
And glory filling day and night
With splendid rapture—dost unbar
Some unimagined golden gate
Of love! How excellent they are—
The clear transfigurements that wait
Throughout the world for thee, O Love,
As for the lifting of a veil
That shows blithe souls that feigned of late
Most funeral faces! how above
The sky of any former pale
And faultless dream becomes the earth
That thou hast touched, the blessèd air
That thou hast breathed in and made fair
With smiles! The cruel stones give birth

To rich unheard-of blooms ; and worth
The great blue side of heaven seems now
The white wall of a prison, if thou
Hast let the sunlight in. And, lo,
Henceforth, there is no kind of woe
To reach the hidden heart and stay
The ecstasy that night and day
Makes lone immense sweet singing there.
—For some, indeed, may love, and lay
Their great resplendent joys quite bare
Before the world,—unshamed and glad
And glorious as they walk from birth
To death, proclaiming they have had
Such fair wealth all their way, such mirth
Of very passionate delight—
Love himself coming to them clad
In some new saffron day and night—
That, truly, all hath been most sweet,
And nothing goodlier need they meet
In heaven: but some, indeed, must keep
A tyranny on lip and look ;
And eyes that fain would smile must weep,
And voice, that fain would ofttimes leap

Into great singing, must all brook
To speak the set words of some book,
  Lest it should sing the secret out
That gilds each thought and glorifies
The infinite innermost that lies
  Dissembled; and no man shall doubt
The pained white of the patient face,
That long it hath been painless,—nay,
  Nor dream the long detested way
Of servitude hath got the grace
  Of some invisible flower set
Sweetening it wondrously all through.
  —Ah, live and bear a little yet
The grey days of your life,—O you—
  Grieving in some unlovely gloom
  A captive, in some martyrdom
Of most intolerable fate,
  Wed for the heartless outer part
Where yet love never wed you;—late,
  Perchance, it shall be, and your heart
Shall have closed every outer gate
  That let love enter from the world:
O bear a little yet and wait:

Ere God hath ceased from you and furled
Away from you the great fair blue,
That paints eternity,—your true,
Your dreamed-of love shall come to you.
His face shall never have lost light
For all the dismal years: his smile
Shall dawn insuperably bright
Upon some long and lonely eve,
When, maybe, you have ceased some while
To weep and almost to believe.
And the night shall not come; but, then,
The endless undivided day
Of the long heaven, and mile on mile
Of a vast and delicious way
Shall gleam out from the ways of men
That hour before you: O to see
His great immortal look, shall be
A perfect end to the long years
Of waiting: O to fill your ears
With the world of each wondrous word,
Shall more than put away your tears;
For you shall know he never erred
That he came not to you: perchance,

Somewhat unearthly shall enhance
His head with glory, and unknown
So long a while, he shall have grown
Almost an angel, in the length
Of coming to you, heaping strength
To win you with! Ah, do you think
That, merely your immaculate
Lone excellence, should never link
Your soul to his, above all fate
Of days that hold you separate?
What is the fastness he shall shrink
From overcoming with some burst
That frees and makes you his, for whole
Requital of his soul athirst
In the dry distance for your soul?
—Though one hath chained up all the ways
In the fair world; though, nights and days
Fall down hard-fettered in some blank
Forgotten dungeon, where a clank
Follows each footstir and subdues
Each daunted word;—did Love ne'er use
His irresistible might and spell
In such-like way as I would tell

In this same story?—Yea, full oft;
And many a cruel fate is soft
  With his rich secret, unbetrayed
  In the deep dwelling he hath made
Within; and few have told or writ
  The splendid simple prodigy
They knew; and none, believing it,
  Have doubted love so secretly
Was foiling the hard world their strong
  Oppression had kept hard so long.

No dame was fairer in the land
  Than Bertha, loved of knight and bard;
And great was he who held her hand
  But loved her not,—he was so hard
So churlish unto love,—and made
No softness for her, but betrayed
  Her sweet bride's faith. He, of his pride
Presumptuous, lusted that the might
  And wealth and territory wide,
Which he had gotten through unright

And stealthy dealing, or by strength
Tyrannously, were made sure plight
Unto some heir of his at length
—To be left full and unaccused
For ever; and no other dread,
Of trampled worth or right refused
Vexed the man now; but only this
Had power frustrating all his bliss,—
That men should come when he was dead
And curse him, for a late redress
Of ancient wrong. Therefore he wed;
And thought most surely to possess
His utmost hope; but heaven foreshowed
Its meaning sternly to upbraid
His memory for rich costs unpaid,
And the whole life-long debt he owed
To vengeance. So the thing he prayed
Withholden was, and that he vowed
Unvisited. And, sorely gnawing
His patience inwardly, two years
He bore; at length, the third year drawing
Fast to its close, no better wears
His straining hope; and now with fears

Grown bitter, he complained and e'en
Condemned that gentle dame, and hid
No longer his ungenerous mien,
But daily taunted her and chid
Her gentleness.—
His crabbed age,
Fallen past reasonable hope
Of all renewal, would assuage
Its envy chiding her, and grope,
Unshamed, amid foul jealousies,
Gathering new resentments still.
He had a sister of like will,
Who with foul infamies and lies
Prompted his ready thoughts to ill:
She was a mean and heartless crone,
Whose life had never flowered in truth
With love or any balm of youth,
But preyed on envyings alone
And cankered to the very bone;
Yea, she quite hated the heart's tint
And the rose flush of lips and health
Of love's own life, accounting wealth
In these things as some dismal stain,

For souls to starve out by sheer stint
Of joy, accounting all men vain
And born for penances and pain.

Therefore, with every harsh endeavour
She did promote her brother's mood
To tyranny, devising ever
Cruel coercions, and such rude
Restraint as made poor Marie hate
Her youth, which constantly renewed
Sick sources to her bitter fate.

And one day, in all love's despite,
—For jealousy, and for great fear,
Lest the all-pitiable sight
Of her more perfect for each tear
Should sometime, with a sudden might
Moving men's hearts to learn the blame,
Plead of their villany; and then
The hideous thing begetting fame,
No honour should be theirs, but shame
And hate in all the hearts of men:
They made some most deceitful tale,—

How, for soul-penance sorely done,
Bertha was fallen sick and pale,
And ailed to be a space alone
And for a space be seen of none.

And, through their wiles, it did not fail
But she was moved to their deceiving,
And that herself performed the thing
With scarce a thought or murmuring,
Full of her early inward grieving.

And lo, they lured her from her bower,
And e'en from all the sick sweet ways
Her tears had worn, and weary days
Found full of soothings, faint and mute,
But fit as lullings of a lute;
And in a lone and distant tower
They left her wounded life to swoon
And wither, like a sapless flower,
Seen only of the midnight moon
Or of the sun at noon.

The chamber was most chill and drear

A place where you might die of fear;
  And, from the casement's irksome height,
  You scarce could snatch a mistful sight
Of the far lands of Brittany:
And other solace none was near,
  Saving to moan and make complaint
All day and night, or else to hear
  Some dolorous deed of monk or saint,
Some dull and hideous litany.

So did this lady live forlorn
  A weary space of weary years;
And day to night and night to morn
  No solace brought, save fruitless tears,
And a new fever of desire
  Like to a famine at the heart
For death, or with some deadly fire
  To burn the fair and youthful part
From the sick life: yea, there was given
  No liberty in any wise,
  Saving to pasture her faint eyes
Upon a blue sweet space in heaven.

Now all the tender things create
  In earth and heaven did surely ache
  Unceasingly for her sweet sake,
And pined for pity of her fate;
Yea, for the sun wept tears of amber;
  And, stealing silently about
  The shrouded lands, the stars did stain
  Pure silver tears upon the plain;
And every night the moon did clamber
Up the steep dark, and o'er her chamber
  Hung, like a great breast lolling out,
  Heavy with pity of her pain.

Sometimes, in the long solitude,
  Her thoughts would weary out their wings,
Despairing of the thing pursued,
  And turn their fruitless flutterings
Back to her bosom void: aghast
  With dreaming, sometimes, they traversed
  Strange wastes where, touching mystic springs,
They gathered timorous forecast

Of futures; sometimes they rehearsed
Sad echoes of the vain sweet past.

Most when the sun was nigh its setting
And all the distant lands lay bright,
She would beguile her soul, forgetting
Its irremediable plight
With sorrow, hour after hour
Striving to reach some distant strain
Of horns, or see some goodly sight
Of hounds and men, or fill again
Her life with perfume of some flower.

Until one day—one summer day,
When birds were singing blithe and loud
In all the world, and not a cloud
Was anywhere in heaven: O day
Most sweet—most sorrowful! she lay
Half swooned upon her bed, and heard
The music under distant trees,
And the close pants of life that stirred
Around her prison, and the breeze

Making a long sweet sigh for pleasure,
And such a low and tender measure
In all the pulses of the air,
That she most bitterly at heart
Strove to be choked with her despair—
To be quite broken with some sigh—
And lay quite still and would not part
Her eyes dull lids, but longed to die,
Beseeching God the time were nigh.

And when the cold and withered maid
Came to her couch, and, in harsh tone,
Bade her to rise and be arrayed,
She feigned great weariness and prayed
She might be left all day alone;
Then lay and kept her eyes quite closed,
And spake not, feigning she reposed;
Till, with no tender uttering
Or pity for her ill, the crone
Departing, fell to muttering
Her crabbed litanies alone.
Then to her thoughts free way she gave
And did devote herself to die,

And with full yearning did apply
Her prayers to God; who—all to save
Her heart—for pity that not yet
Her time was come to die,—instead,
Gave her in deep sleep to forget
Her sorrow, dreaming she was dead
And lying happy in her grave,—
Feeling that little sighs did crave
To have her spirit back again,
And all as though a hand were fain,
Parting leaves here and there, to stir
With tremulous fingers seeking her:
Yea, feeling still the constant wane
Of all her sickness and life-pain,
And how the angels, while she slept,
For her continual healing, wept
Such tears as touched her night and day,
Washing her body all away.

But, while she lay and was at rest,
Dreaming this dream that she was dead,
The sweet contagion of her spread
Sweet fever in the airs at play

And pasture on her brow and breast;
  Yearning through all that summer day
  Soft summer longings to allay
In little ineffectual sips;
Till, chafing for perpetual thirst
  The coverlet, they made a way,
To ravish with their sudden lips
Her luscious limbs, and with the burst
  Half waking her, she did behold
  What luxury and gracious mould
Of breast she had; what pure expanse
And most serene exuberance
  Of limb, which languor of her mood
In all its fairness did enhance;
  And how the slowly blushing blood
Lay in a sweet voluptuous waste
Throughout her body wan and chaste,
  Or, wayward, with inconstant flow
Made blue tracks wantonly, to ooze
Adown each perfect limb, and lose
  In such delicious wastes of snow
Its purple life.
                    Yea, she did gaze,

Still steeped in trance, and with half haze
About her, till a weary tide
—With slow recurrence brought again
Her conscious life, and sad amaze
Flooded her heart to see belied
The dream of death : O she was fain
To dream it back ; but with her eyes
She read how little word of Death
Was written in her, and grew wise
—She thought—of some hard bitter will
Of God to her, that, not until
Some true embrace, some fruitful breath
Of love were come upon her breast,
Would he take ransom for her death,
To let her die and be at rest.

Then —while her memory confest
How she had heard the minstrels tell
That many a lady, so opprest
As she was, had been holpen well,
By miracle of God or man,
To solve her fate ; and she began
To commune how, if she were pure

And altogether good in thought,
Such saving wonder might be wrought
For her,—that hour it did befall
That a vast rush of wing was heard,
And the great shadow of a bird
Came darkly over couch and wall.

And all before her heart, for fear
What sudden omen might be near,
Quicker beat thrice, there came, with noise
Of clashed plumes entering on poise
Of pinions sure, a falcon ; fine
His mien and cresting ; wholly keen
His gaze ; all noble in the line
Of the straight sunbeams he was seen,
Fierce and without constraint or fault
Of wing, to enter straight, nor halt
Till forward pouncing, with a sound
His talons clashed like clang of steel
Sudden flung down, or spurrèd heel
From stirrup lighting on the ground.

Then, seeking, breathless at her heart,

Some imminent future, she apart
Held her white lips; and, all aghast,
Beheld at length how, from the cast
Constraint of plume and talon, rose
The spirit of a noble knight,
Perfect in bearing and bedight
With goodly armature and close
Raiment of mail. And soon the light
Fell from his eyes and with a flame
Touched her heart's snow: pleading he came,
And showed with what surpassing power
Of saintly labours he had earned
Of God this thing for which he yearned;
That he might come to her, what hour
Her own heart, so betrayed, should crave
And cry out for its sweet redress
Of fate, and that she too might have
Love for her love. Then, with a vow,
His faith in God he did confess
With all religion; and, to ease
In all things to the uttermost
Her soul, he prayed that God would show
Some perfect token of His peace:

So, at his prayer, the blessèd Host
Was presently made manifest
Miraculously, to attest
  Him pure, and that he had God's peace.

But, when this holy thing was done,
  She made no further doubt, nor strove
  Longer to stay her heart from love;
But vowed that she would cleave alone
  To this God gave her to redress
  Her long restraint and barrenness,
And all the purpose of her years
And faith so long betrayed to tears.

Thereat her heart was wholly freed;
And, quickened straight in all its seed
  With love's full tender lavishment,
Most rapturous fulfilment bore;
Yea, from recesses at its core,
  Gushed forth, and sudden ravishment
In all her body showering,
  Made sweet amends for the long drouth:
  As doth some tardy luscious growth

Forced sudden into flowering
By late relenting of the South.

So, for a while, those lovers lay
Revelling in a sweet excess
Of restless rapture—lovers' way
Limb over limb; content to press
Each other's speechless lips, or twine
Each other's arms in listless play,
Or feed to a soft weariness
Each other's look,—then to combine
The fainting breath in a low sigh,
And swoon asleep and think to die
At once so blessedly; but pine
Full soon to ravish with new strength
Each other's lips and looks,—at length
Insatiate. It was a pain
To lose each moment, though there grew
Some further bliss; it was a pain
—Though perfectly her lover knew
His mistress' every tint and mood
Or flush that in her face could linger,
—Knew well, oft tenderly retraced

With rapturous and erring finger,
All fair ways fretted by the blood
And every dimple of her waist—
It was a pain one bliss to lose
Changing it for another bliss;
It was a pain one kiss to lose,
Yea, one kiss for another kiss.

So they prolonged their sweet enlacement
Till there was nothing left of day;
And the faint glimmer of the room,
Or a most scarce uncertain ray
From distant stars over the casement
Lit them each other's looks; and gloom
Was shed on them; but all their pleasure
Sufficed them still, with soft delay,
To stay their hearts, and, at love's leisure,
To heap them up great store and treasure
Out of each other's look and way,
Savour of lips, and voice, and aught
Of fair remainder for support
And solace in long hours of blight,
Long seedless fruitless hours unfraught

With any comfortable sight
Or touch of love: and when, compelled
At length, O miserably they quelled
Their rich souls, sundering them unquenched,
Most cruel each from other wrenched
Some uncompleted bliss.

Alas, poor Bertha could not keep
Dissembled quite her change at heart,
And that she did not pine or weep
Or languish more; she could not part
At sudden will from all the bliss
That lingered in her; nor efface
The dimple that full many a kiss
Left on her features or her brow
Too plainly, and in many a place
Upon her breast conceived of snow.

She could not quite disarm or tame
Her lips great fervour to deliver
Their burden of her lover's name,
Nor with whole patience sit and sever

Her thoughts from him, whene'er the dame
Plied her with long constraint or task
  Of prayer: but she was fain for ever
In one of his known looks to bask
Silent; and with no perfect mask
Of meekness could perform her task,
  Keeping at fast her utmost soul
And longing. And, whene'er an hour
  Laxed that most rigorous control,
She would array the passionate power
  Of all her heart, beseeching him,
Through the long silence with his name
  Grown to a murmur reaching him
Perpetual: anon he came
  Prone to her summons.
                Long, with pain
Her tyrants, jealous, sought to guess
What sort of ravishment could bless
  Her life so secretly; but vain
Was all their striving; and, with vile
  Mistrust and most unquiet wonder
  They marked her; ceasing not to ponder
Divers deceits. But, all the while,

The woman set herself with guile
  To reach and ravel out the thing.
And this way : On one morn, deceived,
Bertha too easily believed
  Her feigned departure, hastening
Her heart, scarce patient to abide
  The door's pretended fastening,
And the safe sound of steps outside
  Descending ; then with rapturous start
Let loose her longing, flinging wide
  The casement ; and from all her heart
In mad foretaste precipitate
  Summoned her Love.
                                        And when they knew,
Embraced again, no thought of hate
  And guile so near, but did renew
The long drained sources of their bliss
The woman lurked ; and, not to miss
  Her treacherous purposes, kept still,
  Yea, saw and listened and kept still,
  Stemming her vengeance, more to fill
The craving after, and make wise
  Her way thereto ; so she discerned

The mystic stratagem and guise
  With aid of which that lover earned
His entry arduous; and perceived
  Completely all; then, vowing harm
  With cold and grave intent, she gave
Her brother tidings; and conceived
  With him how best, and with what arm
  Or ambush they should work to have
Their vengeance.
                So, at length, they made
  A weapon many-bladed, fell
  And harsh with clustered points, most keen
And deadly: this—for trap, was laid
  Most deftly, and its purpose well
  Assured, with some sufficient screen,
Upon the window's ledge,—that none
  Entering could escape or foil
Death manifold.
                The thing was done
  At night; and, long ere dawn, the toil
  Was perfect. Then, without recoil
Of conscience, they arose and spared
  No moment; but, with great turmoil,

And marshalling sounds of men and mail
Rife for some service, and such tale
Fitly conceived, they quite ensnared
Their captive—saying her lord was prest
To absence on a distant guest
Of warfare. So the thing prepared
Fell out; that when the distant arms
And clarions of the troop departing
Sent no more sound, and all alarms
Were far away a space, so spared
Favoring of heaven it seemed,—upstarting,
No further tolerant of the load
Of longing, she straightway unbound
Her heart, most urgently to goad
The lagging silence to create
Some presence or fulfilling sound,
For the known bliss importunate.

Then came the dawn with soft delays
Of light, and rapturous restraint
Reluctant; with flushed feet in ways
Voluptuous; full of rich reserve
For passionate noons, the golden taint

Revealing gradual: then elate,
Unerring, on surpassing curve
Of faultless wing, with furious aim
And constant zest, the falcon came
Impetuous; and all his fate,
Wretched and sweet of life and heart,
Wretched and sweet, delicious part
Of love and penalty most dread
Relentless drew him on.
And she
Instant her passionate purpose sped,
Redoubling urgent the decree
With all her heart's might; feeling too
Him all inevitable through
The distance reach her with a keen
Response of coming; feeling too
In all the harassed air between
The close beats of his wings; and still
The latest moment of reprieve
Bearing most niggardly; until,
With harsh plunge and uncertain heave
Of weak wings faltering to compel
His faint course, seeking her, he fell

Wounded of life; and sank and shed
His gentle blood upon the bed.

A little while he baffled Death;
And with incessant fluttering
Contended for some sweet delay,
That he might hold enough of breath
For one last passionate uttering;
But life fell fast within him, yea,
So that he made a piteous plead
Of looks all silently instead,
And panted all his heart away.

But she, in uttermost amaze
Painfully held, was still intent
To see her lover's image raise
Its stained and dabbled mask; and couched
Expectant, with whole tortures pent
At heart a moment's respite, touched
Her full woe tenderly;—nay bent
Against it her full will and strength
Of soul resisting: but at length
It broke her quite; and she confessed

The silence and the grey cold hue,
And gathering death all wan and blue
  That filmed the eye; anon, she pressed
Her bosom to that spoil of love,
That bitter wreck of all her love.

But lo, once more she was aware
  Of something pleading sick and faint
  About her heart,—a speechless plaint
Broken like sighs upon the air
Stirring her sorely; then a hand
  Was laid upon her heart and wielded
Mysteriously her will; she planned
  Nor purposed any course, but yielded
Meekly as in a dream. And so
  She rose, all inwardly impressed,
  And, from the cell with little toil
Released, she lingered not to go;
  Soon the cold corridors confessed,
Whispering with a frozen wind,
  Her steps: but her swift footsteps foil
  Their echoes; and the conscious floors
Betray not, stricken dumb behind
  Her feet; anon, the dismal doors,

Touched with her passionate touch, recoil,
Melted in all their irksome mail
Of bolts and iron frowns—recoil
Setting her free; and as they part
There cometh in a long low wail
—Half of the wind, and at her heart
The hand more heavy doth prevail.

And when before the moat she came,
The bridge stood ready in her way,
As though some traveller that day
Had passed quite recent; and the same
She thought, where on the fields she found
A narrow footway, like a stain
Of steps all recent on the ground.

Then through lands many, green and fair,
Woodlands and many a weary plain
And rugged mountain land, a league
Full hardily she fled; despair
Great in her heart against fatigue.
And ere the day yet threatened night,
She found a city silent and wide,

Silent and wide and full of light.
None stirred in all the street beside
Herself. She entered by the gate
A palace. There with barren state
The voiceless walls were tapestried
Damask and purple; sullen pride
Of pillar frowned; and shapes of stone
Stood ponderous, and all hard-eyed
Beheld her; and a long low moan
The waste winds made in this great dwelling
Desolate. Yet, her soul compelling,
No fear turned back her feet; but loud
The hollow place with harsh repeat
Bore witness of her ardent feet,—
Until she found a chamber proud
With pomp of funeral array:
A gilded gloom stupendous lay
Upon the walls; and a great shroud
In midst upon a regal bier,
With a vast pall upon the ground
Wide trailed: but on that bier she found
Her lover.
Still he seemed but near

His death ; and told her how his soul
  Choked with the slaughtered life, too weak
  Had struggled for a voice to speak
Farewell, in words that should console
Her sorrow ; and at length, bound back
  To fill its twofold death, had yearned
And waited, praying God to slack
  His extreme hand, and sorely earned
Prolonging death this sweet reprieve.

Anon, he bade her to believe
  A piteous thing ; praying thereby
That she would heal her heart, to grieve
Not too devotedly ; and saying,
  That surely he should never die
Quite to his inmost heart ; but, staying
  Deep in his grave her sorrow too
  Would most torment him, throbbing through
His sleep and evermore delaying
His peace and keeping wide the wounds ;
  Yea, with sick longing to regain
Sweet pasts unfinished, full of sounds
Fallen and broken, would reproach

Pure present peace; bringing again
The faded endings of old pain
And crushed world-sweetness to encroach
In the old hollows of the heart;
So still some bitterness should burn
And burn, and he should never earn
His rest of God; ay, never part
Wholly from this great slough of life
And love turned to this dust, this death
Charred and yet chafing.
Never life
Shall light again this dust he said;
Nor can love ever with a breath
Touch me down there where I am laid:
O there shall be a load for this
Upon the very heart of fate;
And something too shall be to miss
From God's full purposes of bliss
And God Himself be all too late
To mend or mourn; for mine shall be
In earth a place most desolate,
Where never flower shall grow nor tree
Hang with sweet shadow,—desolate,

But very peaceful for a grave,
And very fitting so for me.
—Ah, who can say if love may have
Some heaven yet,— some second earth,
Some long revenge for this ill life,
Some sort of death redeeming birth?
—Ah, who can say?—I feel a strife
Of hands about my heart; I thrill
Beneath the shadows of new fates
That cover me; I have a chill
Like death; and yet some touch creates
A warmth like life too; I have sights
Most hard, of lights mingling with lights;
And yet, methinks, I feel but sleep,—
Smell a faint fragrance of dead leaves,
Or of the dust that I shall heap
About my heart: my heart believes
No more—no more than this, and cleaves
O dying, on thy hands my Love!

It was the midnight. His last look
Was fading in the fervid gloom;
And many an aching echo shook

The pauses, moving like a moan;
And dying words' sad monotone
  Lasted about the silent room.
  She was alone with all her doom;
But knew not yet she was alone;
  For all these things, the looks, the words,
  Thronged at her heart, foiling dim swords
That stood inevitable, keeping
A short space charmed with the slow heaping
  Of thought, rich with each lingering sound,—
Ere all fell sickened into weeping
  And the whole bitterness were found.

But soon, out of the distant street
  Came murmurs; and the growing hiss
Of half-hushed voices; and a beat
Of steps and steps of other men;
And fate fell on her heart; and then
  With all her load of broken bliss,
She fled to seek out some retreat
  In all-abiding night.
                                        The moon
Began all wearily to wane:

And she—she lay upon the plain
  Weary, and fell into a swoon;
Then heard most dismally the toll
Of death-bells, heavy with the soul
  Of him her lover; and his doom
  Throbbing across the muffling gloom
Attained her to the very heart;
And gradual there, in every part,
  Grew forth the desolating root
  Of sorrow, piercing shoot by shoot
The soft soil where a rose's stain
  Lay recent; and, where any bliss
Had been, wherever love had lain,
Grew now some seed and fruit of pain
  Rich with the rotting memories.

* * * * *

Then a new wonder, like a thought
Strove with the death in her, and wrought
  With inward accent promising
  Half-sweet, an unimagined thing.

And at last from the bitter ground

She rose, and forward through the night
Her feet miraculously found
A constant guidance, and a might
To go and meet that future fate,
Which yet in such strange manner bound
Her soul to live indeed and wait.

If any saw her in her way,
Passing along the meadows gray
With deep unlifted shrouding still,
Surely they knew not; but beheld
Amazed and with a doubtful thrill:
And, by her shining robe that trailed
Through the dank night; and by the sheen
Of all her raiment, and hair seen
Wondrous, unsoiled, as though availed
No longer spell of day or night
On her; and by the rustlings light
That startled the deep earthly sleep
Along the meadows in her path;
—Surely she seemed to them some wraith
Walking the world on straight intent
Of unaccomplished doom, or sent

To work the purposes of God,
Whereof no man the knowledge hath.

So was there none in all her way
To shame her steps; and ere the day
Betrayed, her feet returning trode
The marble floor of her own hall
And silent passage ancestral
Of that cold place where she abode.

She might not speak at all nor weep;
But such great mystery did cling
Upon her face, that seemed to keep
Knowledge of some most holy thing,
No man found ways to try her more
With base reproof or questioning.

And lo, in due time, and before
Her grief of secret thought was done,
With many an inward holy thrill
And wondrous sign of grace begun
Already plain, God did fulfil
His miracle of love ere long;

So that she bore a goodly Son;
  And lying showed each evil tongue
  That spoke her barren of His grace.

Her child—he had a wondrous face,
  In which was written many a dear
  And lovely word with God's hand clear,
In lineament that she could trace
  More and more through the smiling grace,
To many a noble thing foretold
Of help and blessedness to her:
  So she would read, for days and days,
His holy smiling that consoled
Her heart, and bade her thoughts to err
  Free in all sweet and hopeful ways:

  And afterward there grew much praise
  Of him, for he is named in lays
Yvenec, the Deliverer.

DAME, dist-il, jeo n'aime pas,
D'amurs tenir n'est mie gas;
Cil deit estre de mut grant pris
Qui s'entremet qu'il seit amis:
Tel cinc cent parolent d'amur
N'en sevent pas le pior tur,
Ne que est loiax druerie.
Ains lor rage e lor folie,
Perece, wiseuse e faintise
Enpire amor en mainte guise.
Amors demande caasté,
En fais, en dis e en pensé:
Se l'uns des amans est loiax,
E li autre est jalox e faus,
Si est amors entr'ex fausée,
Ne puet avoir lunge durée.
Amors n'a soing de compagnun,
Boin amors n'est se de Dex nun,
De cors en cors, de cuer en cuer,
Autrement n'est prex à nul fuer.

MARIE: *Lai de Graelent.*

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